Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Tawus Raja

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors, not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

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O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

The translation work of the first thirteen English volumes of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān* was undertaken and published by World Organization for Islamic Services (WOFIS) in 1983 in Qum, Iran. The translation was entrusted to the great scholar, the late ʿAllāmah Sayyid Saʿīd Akhtār Rizvī, may God elevate the status of his soul.

The Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd., an organization that aspires to facilitate and work on projects in the field of Qur'anic *tafsīr* and sciences, has undertaken to complete the remaining volumes of the *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*.

With the blessing of God, we are pleased to present to the reader, the second edition of English volume 28 which covers the *tafsīr* of two complete chapters, Sūrah al-Anbiyāʾ (Chapter 21) and Sūrah al-Ḥajj (Chapter 22). The first edition was published in February of 2016.

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About the Translator

Tawus Raja is an independent translator who has studied Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic philosophy not through formal university or seminary education. His other works include Shining Sun: In Memory of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī (London: ICAS Press, 2011), Divine Flashes of Husayn (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2011) by Ayatullah Husayni Tihrani, and Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2013) by ʿAllāmah Bahr al-Ulum.

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qur'an to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qur'an, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical

and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam*. The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qur'an with the help of the Qur'an itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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The translator is greatly indebted to Dr. Amina Inloes who reviewed the entire manuscript and provided us with her comments and corrections. He also wishes to thank other editors who read, commented and proofread the work, including Sr. Fatima Ali, Tarek Ghanem and Shaykh Bahmanpour.

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Chapter 21

al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets)

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Verses 1-15

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١﴾ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ ذِكْرٍ مِنْ
رَبِّهِمْ مُحْدَثٍ إِلاَّ اسْتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٢﴾ لاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّجْوَى الَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا هَلْ هَذَا إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ أَفَتَأْتُونَ السِّحْرَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾ قَالَ رَبِّي
يَعْلَمُ الْقَوْلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالأَرْضِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٤﴾ بَلْ قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلامٍ
بَلْ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِآيَةٍ كَمَا أُرْسِلَ الأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٥﴾ مَا آمَنَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ مِنْ
قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَفَهُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلاَّ رِجَالاً نُوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ
فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنتُمْ لا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَداً لا يَأْكُلُونَ
الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾ ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ نَشَاءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا
الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾ لَقَدْ أَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَاباً فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ وَكَمْ
قَصَمْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْماً آخَرِينَ ﴿١١﴾ فَلَمَّا أَحَسُّوا بَأْسَنَا
إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يَرْكُضُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ لا تَرْكُضُوا وَارْجِعُوا إِلَى مَا أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ وَمَسَاكِنِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٤﴾ فَمَا زَالَتْ تِلْكَ دَعْوَاهُمْ
حَتَّى جَعَلْنَاهُمْ حَصِيداً خَامِدِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

(21:1) *Their reckoning has drawn near to mankind, while in heedlessness are they turning aside.*

(21:2) *There comes not to them a new reminder from their Lord but*

they hear it while they sport,

(21:3) *Their hearts distracted; and those who are unjust hide their secret counsels: He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves. What! So will you then yield to enchantment while you see?*

(21:4) *He said: My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.*

(21:5) *Nay! say they: Medleys of dreams; nay! he has forged it; nay! he is a poet; so let him bring to us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with).*

(21:6) *There did not believe before them any town which We destroyed; will they then believe?*

(21:7) *And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation, so ask the people of the reminder if you do not know.*

(21:8) *And We did not make them bodies not eating food, and they were not to abide (forever).*

(21:9) *Then We fulfilled Our promise to them, so We delivered them and those whom We wished, and We destroyed the extravagant.*

(21:10) *Certainly We have revealed to you a Book in which is their remembrance; what! Do you not then understand?*

(21:11) *And how many a town which was iniquitous did We shatter, and We raised up after it another people!*

(21:12) *So when they felt Our might, lo! They began to fly.*

(21:13) *Do not fly (now) and come back to where you lived luxuriously and to your dwellings; haply you will be questioned.*

(21:14) *They said: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.*

(21:15) *And this ceased not to be their cry till We made them cut, stilled.*

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to address the subject of prophethood based on belief in monotheism and the resurrection. Thus, it begins with a reminder that the reckoning is nigh, people are not paying attention to it, and they are turning away from the call to the truth—namely, the heavenly revelation. It is this revelation that is the yardstick for reckoning on the Day of Judgment. The verses then talk about prophethood, how the people mocked the Prophet's claim to prophethood, and how they charged him with various allegations including: (1) he is merely a human enchanter; (2) what he has brought is medleys of dreams; (3) rather, he has

forged them; and (4) he is a poet. These statements are refuted by talking generally about the universal characteristics of the past prophets which show that the Prophet does not lack anything which they possessed, and what he has brought is consistent with what they brought.

In support of this concise and general introduction, the chapter then presents the stories of a number of prophets including Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lot, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Ishmael, Enoch (Idrīs), Ezekiel (Dhū al-Kifl), Jonah (Dhū al-Nūn), Zachariah, John and Jesus.

Then the chapter talks about the Day of Reckoning and what the sinners and the God-fearing shall encounter, that the good outcome is for the God-fearing, and that the earth will be inherited by His righteous servants. It then says that the people turn their backs to prophethood because they are averse to monotheism, which it proves through arguments as it proved prophethood. The chapter contains more threats and warnings than promises or glad tidings. It is unanimously agreed that the chapter is Meccan, and its content and context testify to this.

Commentary

اقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١﴾

(21:1) ***Their reckoning has drawn near*** **(iqtaraba)** ***to mankind*** **(lil-nās)*****, while in heedlessness are they turning aside.***

Iqtirāb is from the root *qurb* (closeness, proximity). *Iqtaraba* and *qaruba* mean the same thing (to draw near, to approach, to come close). The only difference is that *iqtaraba* is more expressive in conveying a sense of closeness because it has more letters; it indicates a higher degree of nearness. Both *qurb* and *iqtirāb* are made transitive with particles *min* (from) and *ilā* (to). When it is said that "Zayd has drawn near *min* (lit. 'from') ʿAmr," closeness is measured with ʿAmr as a point of reference. When it is said that "Zayd is close *ilā* (lit. 'to') ʿAmr," closeness is measured from Zayd's point of view. This is because etymologically *min* refers to the beginning of a course while *ilā* marks its end.

Therefore, in this verse, the letter *lām* (lit. "for") in *lil-nās* (to mankind) means "to" (*ilā*), not "from" (*min*), because the verse is talking about how the reckoning is approaching the people. Their reckoning is seeking them and nearing them while they heedlessly turn away [from it].

What is meant by "reckoning" here is God's reckoning and calculating their deeds on the Day of Resurrection. Some exegetes have insisted that "reckoning" here does not refer to the very act of reckoning, but it refers to the *time* of reckoning, which means that "reckoning" is used metaphorically to indicate the *time* of reckoning, or that "time" is an implied omitted term in the verse. Others have justified this by arguing that proximity and remoteness are applicable to time [not the act of reckoning]. Thus, when events are described as being near or far, it is always through the intermediary of time.

However, the objective sought here necessitates a reminder of reckoning itself, because the context is about the people's deeds for which they are accountable. God's wisdom necessitates that an admonition should come down to them from their Lord to draw their attention to what they will be accountable for. And in return, it is incumbent upon them to listen to it earnestly, not frivolously or inattentively. If the theme of these verses were to describe the horrors of the Hour and the punishment promised to the sinners, then it would have been more appropriate to talk about the "day" of reckoning, or to assume that "time" or something similar to it is implied in the verse.

Al-nās (the people) means the genus; that is, human society, most of whom happened to be polytheists at that time. It does not specifically mean the polytheists, even though the qualities described here—such as heedlessness, turning away, and mockery—were attributes of the polytheists. In other words, this is not an example of metaphorically applying the rule for some to all, or a part to the whole. On the contrary, the rule is applied literally to the entire human society, but then those who are free from these qualities are exempted, as alluded to in: *And those who are unjust hide their secret counsels* (21:3)[1] and: *So We delivered them and those whom We wished* (21:9). The Qur'an habitually uses this language when it addresses the society in general: it attributes something to the entire society, but then it makes exceptions for those who are not characterized by it.

In brief, there is a difference between the following: (1) taking the entire society to be subject to a rule, but then taking exception to individuals who are not characterized by it; and (2) taking the majority of individuals to be the subject of a rule, but then applying the rule to everyone

1 This is an exception in the sense that evil counseling is attributed only and specifically to the unjust. (Trans.)

as a metaphorical ascription and generalization. The matter at hand is an example of the former, not the latter.

There are two explanations suggested by the exegetes about how the reckoning has drawn near to the people:

Every day the world draws closer to the reckoning from the last day.

The reckoning has drawn near in the sense that the Prophet was sent at the end of time, as he said: "The raising of me [as a messenger] and that of the Hour are like these two" [and he held up and pressed his index and middle fingers together].

The first suggested explanation fits a wording that indicates continuity, but the verse is in the past tense [*iqtaraba*] which indicates that an action has already occurred. A similar explanation offered to this view is that the use of past tense here indicates the inevitability of its occurrence, as it is said, "Everything which shall come is near" (*kullu mā huwa ātin qarībun*).[1]

… while in heedlessness are they turning aside: They are engrossed in the life and affairs of this the world and have busied themselves with its pleasure. Their hearts are filled with the love of this life, leaving no room for an effective and awakening remembrance of the reckoning that is to come. Their case is so severe that even if they are reminded, they do not take heed. That is called *ghaflah* (inadvertence, negligence, heedlessness), and it equally applies to two cases: (1) when something is not noticed in the first place; and (2) when something is noted but not in a way that affects the soul.

This would answer the objection that "inadvertence" necessitates not noticing something, but the verse has coupled it with "turning aside" which necessitates being aware of something, and these two are contradictory. The answer, in short, is that their inadvertence of the reckoning refers to their inability to give it due recognition, and their turning aside refers to their preoccupation with things that prevent them from taking their knowledge [of the reckoning] seriously.

Al-Zamakhsharī has answered the above objection as follows:

> The verse says that they are both heedless and turning aside. This means that: (1) They are inattentive of their reckoning, do not pay attention to it, do not think about their end, and pay no heed to the outcome of their affair, even though their minds dictate

1 This is a famous expression that is also used in the narrations. (Trans.)

that the requital of the good-doers and evil-doers is something inevitable. (2) Then, whenever they are warned, reminded, and awakened from their sleep by the recitation of God's communications and warnings, they turn aside, plug their ears, and flee.

The difference between our explanation and Zamakhsharī's is that he views "heedlessness" and "turning aside" as two different, sequential stages, as opposed to being two simultaneous, parallel behaviors. However, it should be admitted that the apparent meaning of the verse is that they are characterized by these two qualities at the same time, not one building on the other.

Some exegetes have responded to the objection by saying that *iʿrāḍ* (turning aside) here means to have a wide scope and expanse.[1] The meaning would be: "They are extensively heedless of it." Others have said that heedlessness (*ghaflah*) here means negligence (*ihmāl*), and there is no contradiction between negligence and turning aside. However, both explanations are examples of an unnecessary restriction of the meaning.

The meaning is: The reckoning of their deeds has neared people while they are constantly or mostly inadvertent. They have turned their backs to it since they are distracted by worldly occupations; they are not prepared for it through repentance, belief, and guarding against evil.

مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ ذِكْرٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ مُحْدَثٍ إِلاَّ اسْتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ۝٢ لاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ

(21:2-3) ***There comes not to them a new*** **(muḥdathin)** ***reminder from their Lord but they hear it while they sport*** **(yalʿabūna, from laʿib),** ***their hearts distracted*** **(lāhiyatan, from lahw)…**

This is an explanation for His words: *and in heedlessness are they turning aside* (21:1). If they had not been heedless or turning aside, they would not have played around or trifled upon hearing a reminder that was only meant to draw their attention to something that they should prepare for. The verse is mentioned as a new sentence—not joined to the last with a conjunction [like "and" or "then"]—because it is an explanation for the previous verse [not a consequence or complement of it].

"Reminder" (*dhikr*) here means that by which God is remembered. That would be divine revelations like heavenly scriptures, including the

1 This is based on one of the lexical meanings of *ʿarḍ*, which is "width" or "expanse." (Trans.)

Noble Qur'an. Its "coming to them" means it has been revealed to the Prophet, he has communicated it to them, and they have heard it. *Muḥdath* means "new," which has a relative meaning. Here it is an adjective for reminder (*dhikr*). For example, the Qur'an is a new reminder since it came after the Gospel, and the Gospel was a new reminder since it came after the Torah. Similarly, some of the chapters and verses of the Qur'an are new reminders relative to others which came before them.

But they hear it eliminates all possible conditions that one may have upon receiving a new reminder from one's Lord, except for two conditions: *while they sport* and *their hearts distracted.* Therefore, these are two intertwined qualifiers which describe their state when *they hear it.*

Laʿib is a coherent act that has no purpose beyond the imaginary, like the games that children play. *Lahw* is when people are distracted from what should concern them. *Alhāhu kadhā* means that something has distracted a person from an important matter. That is why musical instruments are called *ālāt al-lahw* (instruments of distraction) and *malāhī* (means of distraction). *Lahw* is a characteristic of the heart; that is why it is attributed to the heart in the verse: *their hearts are distracted*.

The meaning is: There comes not to them—by way of revelation and communication—any new reminder from their Lord in any state except that they are playing and their hearts are distracted; they listen to it in such a state. In other words, the arrival and renewal of a reminder does not have the slightest effect on them; it does not prevent them from being distracted by the sport and play of this world; it does not make them conscious of what lies ahead. Clearly the implied meaning is that no reminder has any effect on them in any condition, not that a new reminder has no effect on them but older reminders do.

The literal meaning of the verse has been used as evidence that the Qur'an is created (*muḥdath*) and not eternal (*qadīm*). In response, the Ashʿairites have said that the reminder [that is, the Qur'an] is created on the account of its revelation, which does not contradict its inherent eternality. Yet, the apparent meaning of the verse is against them. There is more to this topic which we shall address in a separate discussion [below].

Discussion Concerning the Createdness or Eternity of God's Speech

(1) What does the Origination and Eternity of Speech mean?

When we hear the speech of a speaker, such as a poem by a poet, we do not hesitate to ascribe it to the person. If he repeats his words for a second time, we would have no doubt that they are his original words that are uttered another time. Similarly, if someone else narrates the same words from him, we will consider them to be the very speech of the first speaker. Whenever these words are stated thereafter, even if they are repeated forever, we consider them to be the original words that issued from the initial speaker.

This is according to a conventional understanding. However, upon further scrutiny, we would realize that the truth of the matter is the opposite. For instance, when someone says, "Zayd came to me," it is not a single utterance. Rather, it consists of different letters, each of which is a sound that the speaker has produced by using a part of his mouth. The collection of several sounds is not really a single unit, but it is called one only conventionally and by mental construction (*iʿtibār*).

Subsequently, what the speaker of the original words says for a second time and that what the narrator quotes from him for a third and fourth time and so on, are all new sounds that are uttered and produced similar to the first speech. They are not identical to it except by a mental abstraction and convention. What qualifies these sounds as "speech" is that they are according to certain conventionally assigned rules and signs. Likewise, they are considered to be the same only because they collectively convey the same intended meaning.

To summarize the above, speech (*kalām*) in and of itself is only a matter of convention and mental construction, without any independent reality outside the mind and beyond convention. What exist in the external world are the realities of individual sounds which are mentally and conventionally used as signs and indications. They exist externally only as sounds, not as assigned signals. Thus, the ascription of real existence to "speech" is rather metaphorical.

It thus becomes clear that speech can neither be described by origination (*ḥudūth*) nor by subsistence (*baqāʾ*), for they are both qualities of real things that exist externally. Origination is when the existence of something is preceded by temporal non-existence, and subsistence is when something continues to exist consistently over two points in time. Likewise, speech cannot be described by eternity (*qidam*), because that is applicable to something that is not preceded by temporal non-existence.

This is also a quality of external realities, not conventional and mentally posited matters.

Furthermore, there is another problem with speech being eternal: speech is made up of sequentially ordered letters, some of which come before others, but precedence and consequence are not applicable in a context of eternity. Eternal speech means that the parts that follow would be both originated and eternal, which is a contradiction. Thus it is inconceivable for speech—that is, a sequence of arranged letters that indicate a complete meaning conventionally—to be eternal. Not to mention that eternal speech is impossible to begin with. You should contemplate this.

(2) Is Speech in and of itself an Action or an Essential Attribute?

If speech is an action, it means that the speaker's essence is complete within itself without any need for speech and articulation. Speech only emanates from the speaker's essence afterwards, at a level beyond the plane of the essence. If speech is an essential attribute of the speaker, it would be like life which is an essential element of animals, or like evenness which is inseparable from the number four. Which one is the case? The truth is that speech is undoubtedly neither an action nor an essential attribute of the speaker, because it is a matter of mental construction and convention, without any reality in the external world. Hence, it is not a real action that issues externally from an essence, nor is it an attribute of a noun in the external world.

True, speech is a label that is applied to an external matter: an ordered series of sounds which are a real action in the external world. Since the uttering of these sounds is an action, what is conventionally called "speech" is also treated as an "action" by extension. This is why the person uttering these sounds is called a "speaker" (*mutakallim*), implying that he is a "doer" or "actor" of this "action." Then we derive an attribute from the relationship of this action to the speaker, just like in other conventional matters such as humbleness, respect, disrespect, purchase, or sale.[1]

(3) Analyzing the meaning of Speech

We can analyze speech according to its purpose, which is to reveal

1 These concepts refer to certain real acts in the external world which are conventionally interpreted and treated as specific concepts. For example, "respect" is a label that we assign to a certain behavior or action, and thus we derive the attribute "respectful" from this mental construct and interpretation. (Trans.)

hidden meanings in the mind. It thus becomes a real thing as opposed to something conventional. This is true of most or all conventional matters, and the Qur'an has used it with regard to many ideas such as prostration (*sujūd*), subservience (*qunūṭ*), obedience, disinclination, ownership, throne (*ʿarsh*), pedestal (*kursī*), and book.

The essence of speech is that it reveals what one holds within. As a result, every effect is a "speech" of its cause, because, through its existence, it reveals the existential qualities and perfections within the cause. More subtly, the essential attributes of a thing are its "speech," for they reveal what the essence holds in itself. This is what is meant when philosophers say that God's essential attributes such as knowledge, power and life are His "speech," and that the world is also His "speech."

Given this analysis of speech, an instance of speech can be either eternal or originated depending on the type of existence that it reduces to. God's knowledge would be an *eternal speech* of His because it is identical to His eternal essence. Zayd, on the other hand, would be an *originated speech* of God—in the sense that he is a sign of God. God's revelation that came down upon the Prophet would be *originated* in the sense that it was an act of teaching by God. But it is also part of God's [eternal] knowledge, and His knowledge is a form of His speech. Therefore, His revelation would be *eternal* in this sense by the eternity of His Essence, just as His knowledge of all things—whether timeless or originated—is eternal.

(4) Summary

If what is meant by the Noble Qur'an is these verses which we recite—as expressions that indicate certain mental meanings like all other speech—then it cannot really be described as either originated or eternal. It can be considered originated in the sense that the sounds which are labeled "God's speech" and "the Qur'an" are originated.

If what is meant by it is its true meanings as part of God's knowledge, then it would be like His knowledge of any other reality, which is eternal because God's knowledge is eternal. Therefore the Qur'an is eternal, meaning that His knowledge of the Qur'an is eternal, just as Zayd—who is originated—is eternal in the sense that God's knowledge of him is eternal.

Thus it becomes clear that the discussion about the origination versus eternality of the Qur'an *as Allah's speech* is futile. The verses of the Qur'an that are recited as a string of sounds which indicate a meaning cannot be called eternal, for that would be a presumptuous claim because they are

clearly preceded by non-existence. Nevertheless, these verses are eternally present in God's knowledge; that is, His knowledge of His Book is eternal. However, this is not a particular quality of His Book, for indeed His knowledge of *everything* is eternal according to the eternality of His Essence, for what is meant by knowledge here is God's essential knowledge [that is, His knowledge which is identical with His Essence].

Furthermore, there are no grounds for considering "speech" to be another affirmative attribute (*al-ṣifat al-thubūtiyyah*) of His holy essence in addition to knowledge, because the attribute of speech in Him traces back to His knowledge. If speech were to be another affirmative essential attribute, then we could consider anything that can be analyzed as one of His true affirmative attributes as an additional affirmative attribute. In that case there would be no limit to His affirmative attributes, because one could equally add many other attributes to the list, such as outwardness, inwardness, magnificence, splendor, light, beauty, perfection, completion, or simplicity.

The definition of *kalām* (speech, words) in religious and Qur'anic usage is its first and direct meaning which does not involve any analysis [that is, a string of words that are uttered in sequence]. This can be seen in the following verses: *We have made some of these messengers to excel the others among them are they to whom Allah spoke* (2:253), *And to Moses, Allah addressed His Word, speaking* (*to him*) (4:164), *And a party from among them indeed used to hear the Word of Allah, then altered it* (2:75), and: *They altered the words from their places* (5:13).

One exegete has said that there is a type of speech that subsists within the speaker's self, and that is different from speech that is spoken. This is referred to in the following poem:

Verily speech is really in the heart
The tongue is only a means
To convey it and impart.

This "inherent speech" of God can be described as being eternal, but His articulated speech cannot.

The problem with this view is that if "inherent speech" refers to the meanings that are then spoken—or the mental form of those meanings—then that is simply part of His knowledge, not a distinct quality

from knowledge. And if "inherent speech" has a different meaning, then we cannot conceive what that could be, for we do not find anything like that in ourselves.[1]

As for the poem that he has quoted in an intellectual discussion, it neither benefits him nor harms us. Intellectual discussions are too elevated for poets to step into.

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لاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّجْوَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا هَلْ هَذَا إِلاَّ بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ أَفَتَأْتُونَ السِّحْرَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(21:3) ***Their hearts distracted*** **(lāhiyatan, from lahw)*****; and those who are unjust hide their secret counsels*** **(asarru al-najwā, from isrār):** ***He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves. What! So will you then yield to enchantment while you see?***

Isrār is the opposite of *iʿlān* (to declare, to announce, to proclaim). Therefore, using *isrār* with *najwā* emphasizes the sense of concealment. In other words, *isrār* of any regular speech means concealing it, which is equivalent to *najwā* (lit. whisper), but here the verse is talking about "the concealment of *najwā*." The subject of the verb in *asarrū al-najwā* (they hide their secret counsels) is "people" [mentioned in verse 21:1]. This could be attributed to all people on the account of the overall spirit of heedlessness and turning away in their society, but other than that, such counsels and conspiracies were not the act of all of them or even most of them. There were among them those who were disadvantaged and those who took no interest in such counsels. For this reason, He has qualified the ascription by saying *those who are unjust*, which is a descriptive addition meant to clarify that only the unjust among them had these secret counsels, not all of them.

… He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves. What! So will you then yield to enchantment while you see? This is what they counseled secretly about. Of course, they were more than open in rejecting the Prophet, stating that he was only a mortal, and calling the Qur'an an enchantment. None of these were things that they kept secret. However, what is said

1 That is, there is no other perceivable and plausible meaning for "inherent speech." (Trans.)

here is about a stage prior to that, where they conspired with one another about how to confront the Prophet and respond to his call to believe in God and his messengership. At that point they had no choice but to hide their conversation, although afterwards they would publicly announce their stand in opposition to his call.

Their counsel incorporated two ideas that they expressed as firm statements or negative rhetorical questions in denial: *Is this ought but a mortal like yourselves?* and *What! Will you then yield to enchantment while you see?*

The first claim was an argument to refute his prophethood. They used a demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhā*) instead of the regular pronoun "he" (*huwa*) to indicate that "this is a person whom you can see." Their argument was: As you can see he is just a mortal like yourselves and does not differ from you in any way that is exclusive to him. Thus, if his claim of having a connection to the unseen and a link to the divine were true, then you should have had the same connection, for you are humans just like him. Since you do not have any such connection or information, it shows that he has no such connection or information either. Thus, he is not a prophet as he claims to be.

*… **What! So will you then yield to enchantment while you see?*** The letter *fā'* (lit. "so, then") indicates that they said this as a consequence and conclusion following their claim that he is not a prophet because he is a mortal. The meaning is: Since he is not a prophet connected to the unseen, what he has brought to you as a sign of his prophethood is not a miraculous sign from God. Rather, it is only an enchantment that you are unable to reproduce. No one who sees clearly should give in to an enchantment and believe in an enchanter.

قَالَ رَبِّي يَعْلَمُ الْقَوْلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

(21:4) ***He said: My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing.***

That is, His knowledge embraces anything that is spoken in any place, whether secretly or openly. He is the Hearer of all the things that you say and Knower of everything that you do. Thus, all matters and decisions are up to Him, and no part of it is mine.

The verse is quoting the Prophet's answer to their secret counsels and their resolution to reject his prophethood and accuse his miracle—that is, his book—of being an enchantment. The matter is referred back to God

in the verse as it is in most places where the people asked him to bring their desired miracle. For example: *Say: The knowledge (thereof is only with Allah and I am only a plain warner* (67:26); *He said: The knowledge is only with Allah, and I deliver to you the message with which I am sent* (46:23); *Say: The signs are only with Allah, and I am only a plain warner* (29:50). The same idea is seen in the stories of the other prophets.

بَلْ قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ بَلِ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِآيَةٍ كَمَا أُرْسِلَ الْأَوَّلُونَ ۝٥

(21:5) ***Nay! say they: Medleys of dreams; nay! he has forged it; nay! he is a poet; so let him bring to us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with).***

This is a series of their escalating accusations in rejecting the Prophet. *Medleys of dreams* means that he has seen a mishmash of things in dreams and has reckoned them to be a prophetic message and a scripture. This is a more despicable accusation than that of enchantment [in 21:3].

… nay! he has forged it: This is an escalation from the previous accusation because *medleys of dreams* implies that he was mistaken or confused, whereas forging implies intent and deliberation.

… nay! he is a poet: This is a further escalation because what a forger says is thought out and planned, but a poet's speech arises from imagination and emotion. He says what his feelings dictate to him without pondering or reflecting. That is why a poet may praise the foul in spite of its foulness, or criticize the fair notwithstanding its fairness. Likewise, he may deny a fundamental belief, insist on pure falsehood, confirm a lie, or negate a truth

… so let him bring to us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with): This is their conclusion based on the first part of the verse. "The former" (*al-awwalīn*) here means the previous prophets. It means: Since what he has brought as a sign—that is, the Qur'an—is medleys of dreams, a forgery, or poetry, his claim to prophecy is not proven through it and we are not convinced. Thus he should bring a sign like the former prophets did such as the she-camel, the staff, or the white hand.

It would have been expected for the verse to say "as the former *brought*" but it says "as the former *were sent*." This alludes to the fact that bringing a sign is a necessary requirement of being sent [by God as a messenger].

Thus, if he is truly a messenger, then he should follow the former ones with regard to their proof of their message.

The polytheists among the idolaters categorically denied prophethood. Therefore there is a clear sign of contradiction and confusion in their words: *So let him bring us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with)*. Their claims show that they did not know what to do. In one case they confronted him through mockery; then they started making accusations; and then they contradicted their own beliefs by asking for a sign like the signs of the former ones even though they did not believe in their message and did not acknowledge their signs.

… so let him bring to us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with): This statement of theirs implies a promise that if he were to bring one of the suggested signs, then they would believe.

مَا آمَنَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا ۖ أَفَهُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

(21:6) ***There did not believe before them any town which We destroyed; will they then believe?***

This refutes and denies the implied promise above—that they would believe if he brought any of the suggested signs of the former ones: *So let him bring us a sign as the former (prophets) were sent (with)* (21:5). The gist of the verse according to the context is: They are not truthful in their promise. If We did send down to them any of the signs of the former ones which they have suggested, then they will not believe, and this will lead to their doom and destruction. This is because the people of the previous towns and nations suggested such signs and We granted their request, but they did not believe in Our signs and so We destroyed them. Since the nature of these people is the same as that of their predecessors in terms of extravagance and arrogance, they will not believe either. Hence, the verse is in a sense similar to His words: *But they would not believe in what they had rejected before* (10:74).

Based on the above, the verse involves some implied omission and abridgment to this effect: The inhabitants of the towns who lived before them and who demanded a sign which We granted, none of them believed. Thus We destroyed them because they still did not believe despite receiving Our signs. So will they—that is, the Arab polytheists—believe even though they are just like the previous nations in extravagance?

… which We destroyed: This is the last thing that happened to the

towns, which shows that the consequence of granting their suggestion was nothing but destruction.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ ۖ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾

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(21:7) ***And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation, so ask the people of the reminder if you do not know.***

This answers their argument against the Prophet's prophethood on the account that: *He is nothing but a mortal like yourselves* (21:3). The verse says that the past prophets were nothing but mortal men either, so mortality does not contradict prophethood.

Describing these men as *to whom We sent revelation* is to show the difference between prophets and others. The only thing that distinguishes a prophet from others is that "We reveal to prophets but not to others." Revelation is a special gift that only *they* receive, not a universal rule that would apply to all human beings such that if it happens for one then it should happen for all, and if it is missing in a person then it cannot be found in others. Therefore you cannot conclude and judge that since you do not have it, the Prophet does not have it either. In this sense prophethood is like the other specific qualities that are found only in some individuals. The reality and existence of such qualities is undeniable.

The verse can be broken down into two proofs that refute their denial of his prophethood based on his mortality:

(1) A destructive answer (*al-jawāb al-naqḍī*) which breaks down their argument by referring to the case of other human beings who were prophets. This shows that there is no contradiction between being a mortal and being a prophet.

(2) A constructive answer (*al-jawāb al-ḥallī*) that solves the problem by saying that what makes a person a prophet is not a quality that must either be found in no one or everyone. Rather, it is divine revelation, which is a special favor and honor that God grants to whom He pleases. Hence, the verse from this perspective is similar to: *They said: You are nothing but mortals like us…Their s said to them: We are nothing but mortals like yourselves, but Allah bestows (His) favors on whom He pleases of His servants* (14:10-11).

… so ask the people of the reminder if you do not know: This reinforces

and supports the first part of the verse: *And We did not send before you any but men*. That is: if you know then that is it,[1] but if you do not know, refer to the people of the reminder and ask them if the former prophets were anything but human beings. "Reminder" (*dhikr*) here means "scripture, heavenly book." *The people of the reminder* are the People of the Book who went along with the polytheists in their enmity to the Prophet. The polytheists used to honor them, consult them at times regarding the Prophet, and ask them for questions by which they could test him. They were the ones who set the polytheists above the Muslims by saying that: *These are better guided in the path than those who believe* (4:51). The imperative *so ask* is directed to the Prophet and anyone else who would hear this command, including both the people of knowledge and the ignorant. Proposing a challenge like this is common in speaking, and it is meant to confirm one's view.

وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَا يَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(21:8) ***And We did not make them bodies not eating food, and they were not to abide (forever).***

That is: They were mortal men. We did not remove from them any of the features of regular human beings by making them bodies that were devoid of the spirit of life, or were needless of food or drink. Nor did We protect them from death so that they might abide forever. Instead, they were created as mortals who used to eat food—which is a necessity for human beings—and they also died, which is also a necessity like eating.

ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ نَشَاءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(21:9) ***Then We fulfilled Our promise to them, so We delivered them and those whom We wished, and We destroyed the extravagant.***

This follows what was said earlier: *And We did not send before you any but men* (21:7). It explains the consequence of their being sent and the end of the extravagant among their nations who requested miracles from them. It also elaborates on their destruction that was referred to above—*any town which We destroyed* (21:6)—which threatens the polytheists as well.

"Promise" in *Then We fulfilled Our promise to them* means the promise

1 That is, if you are familiar with the case of the previous prophets, then you would know that they were mortals. (Trans.)

of supporting their religion and establishing their call, which was to the word of truth. This promise is seen in many verses such as: *And certainly Our word has already gone forth in respect of Our servants, the messengers: Most surely they shall be the assisted ones. And most surely Our host alone shall be the victorious ones* (37:171-173).

… so We delivered them and those whom We wished, and We destroyed the extravagant: *Those whom We wished* means the messengers and the believers. He promised to deliver them, as He says: *It is binding on Us (that) We deliver the believers* (10:103). "The extravagant" are the polytheists in the sense that they transgressed the limits of servitude [to God]. The rest is clear.

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(21:10) ***Certainly We have revealed to you a Book in which is their remembrance; what! Do you not then understand?***

This is a description of how God has blessed and favored this nation by revealing the Qur'an to them. *Their remembrance* means a special reminder for them which is appropriate to their condition. They are given a Book that measures up to the highest level that the human capacity can reach in terms of sublime facts and teachings. It also includes the most proper and purest religious laws that can be implemented in human societies. The address is to the entire nation.[1]

One of the exegetes has suggested that "remembrance" here means "honor." That is: your honor lies in this Book if you cling to it, because you will be remembered by it. This is how he has also interpreted His words: *And most surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you shall soon be questioned* (43:44). This means that the verse is addressed to all believers or all Arabs, for the Qur'an was revealed in their language. This opinion, however, is unlikely.

وَكَمْ قَصَمْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنْشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ ﴿١١﴾ فَلَمَّا أَحَسُّوا بَأْسَنَا إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يَرْكُضُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ لَا تَرْكُضُوا وَارْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَا أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ وَمَسَاكِنِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٤﴾ فَمَا زَالَتْ

1 That is, the audience of the verse is everyone from the time of Prophet Muḥammad onwards, for whom the Qur'an was sent. (Trans.)

تِلْكَ دَعْوَاهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَعَلْنَاهُمْ حَصِيدًا خَامِدِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(21:11-15) ***And how many a town which was iniquitous did We shatter*** **(qaṣamnā, from qaṣm),** ***and We raised up*** **(anshaʾnā, from inshāʾ)** ***after it another people! So when they felt*** **(aḥassū, from iḥsās)** ***Our might*** **(baʾsanā),** ***lo! They began to fly*** **(yarkuḍūna, from rakḍ).** ***Do not fly (now) and come back to where you lived luxuriously (utriftum fihi, from itrāf) and to your dwellings; haply you will be questioned. They said: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust. And this ceased not to be their cry till We made them cut, stilled*** **(ḥaṣīdan khāmidīna, from khumūd).**

Qaṣm means "to break and shatter." *Qaṣama ẓahrahu* means: "it [or he] broke his back." It is used metaphorically for destruction. *Inshāʾ* means "to create, to raise up." *Iḥsās* means "sensory perception." *Baʾs* means "punishment." *Rakḍ* means "to run fast and vigorously." *Itrāf* means "to indulge in abundant ease and comfort." *Ḥaṣīd* means "that which is cut," as in *ḥaṣād al-zarʿ* (harvest). *Khumūd* means "stillness" and "silence."

The meaning is: *how many a town* that is, the inhabitants thereof, *which was iniquitous* to themselves through extravagance and unbelief, *did We shatter*, meaning We destroyed. *And We raised up*: We brought into being, *after it another people*. *So when they felt*: when the people of the iniquitous town sensed and encountered *Our might*, that is, Our punishment, *lo! They began to fly*: they started running away like an escaping army. So they were told in rebuke and censure: *Do not fly (now) and come back to where you lived luxuriously*: come back to your bounties, *and to your dwellings*, return to your homes, *haply you will be questioned* so that the poor and the needy may rush to you, begging, so that you may [once again] be arrogant and pompous toward them, and/or veil yourselves from them. This is a metaphorical way of describing their pride and conceit, and how they deemed themselves—instead of God—to be lords that should be followed by the masses.

They said, regretfully, *O woe to us! Surely we were unjust. And this ceased not to be their cry.* Their saying *O woe to us!* shows their acknowledgement of God's Lordship and their iniquity against themselves. *Till We made them cut* that is, harvested and cut, *stilled*: abated and quiet the way fire abates, no sound being heard from them, nor any name or fame remaining of them.

Some exegetes have provided other explanations for *haply you will be*

questioned which are far from the apparent sense of the verse. We shall skip them.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Riḍā said to Abū Qurrah, Shubrumah's companion: "The Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, the Qur'an and every Scripture that has been revealed are God's speech revealed to everyone as light and guidance. They are all originated (*muḥdathah*) and other-than-God, for indeed He says: *Or that it may produce a [new] reminder* (yuḥdithu) *for them* (20:113), and He says: *There comes not to them a new reminder* (muḥdathin) *from their Lord but they hear it while they sport* (21:2). God has originated all the Scriptures which He has revealed."
Abū Qurrah then asked: "So will they perish?" The Imam replied: "The Muslims agree that everything apart from God is His work and action (*fiʿl*). The Torah, the Gospel and the Qur'an are God's works. Have you not heard the people say, 'The Lord of the Qur'an'? Have you not heard that on the Day of Resurrection the Qur'an will come and say—even though God knows everyone better than it does: 'O, Lord, this is so-and-so! I made his day thirsty and his night sleepless, so let me intercede for him.' Similarly, the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms are all created, originated, and have a Lord. They are originated by He Who has no likeness, for people endowed with reason. Thus, anyone who claims that they have eternally existed is effectively saying that God is not the First and Only Eternal Being, and that His speech has always has been with Him without having a beginning…[1]

(2) Concerning His Words, *Their hearts distracted* (lāhiyatan) (21:3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: it [*lāhiyatan*] is from *talahhī* (diversion, distraction).

(3) Concerning His Words, *There did not believe before them any town which We destroyed; will they then believe?* (21:6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "how would they believe [that is, how are they expected to believe] when those before them did not believe in the signs until they were destroyed?"

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1 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, on the authority of Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā.

(4) Zurārah says: Concerning His Words, *so ask the people of the reminder if you do not* (21:7), I asked Imam al-Bāqir, "Who is meant by that?" He said, "We are." I asked, "So you are those who should be asked?" He replied, "Yes." I asked: "And we are those who should ask?" He replied: "Yes." I asked: "So we have to ask you?" He said: "Yes." I asked: "And then you have to answer us?" He replied: "No, that is up to us. We will do so if we want, and will not do so if we do not want." He then recited: *This is Our free gift; therefore, give freely or withhold, without reckoning* (38:39).[1]

Author's comment: The same idea is also narrated by al-Tabrisī in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, from Imams ᶜAlī and al-Bāqir. It then adds: "This is supported by the fact that God has referred to the Prophet as: *a reminder—a messenger*" (65:10-11).

This is certainly an application of the verse to a particular instance (*jary*); otherwise the verse's meaning is general. The "reminder" is the Qur'an, all heavenly scriptures, or all forms of divine teaching. Needless to say, the Imams are certainly the first people and the foremost possessors of such knowledge. The above narration is clearly not an exegesis of the verse according to the specific circumstances in which it was revealed, because it would make no sense to refer the polytheists to the Messenger's Household or the people of the Qur'an given that they were their enemies. If they were to accept from them, they would have accepted from the Prophet himself.

(5) Here are some of Imam ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn's words where he admonishes the people and urges them to disinclination toward this world: God has indeed made you hear through His Book what He did to iniquitous people among the people of the towns before you, where He says: *And how many a town which was iniquitous did We demolish* (21:11). What He means by "town" is its inhabitants, because He then says: *And We raised up after it another people* (21:11). Then He says: *So when they felt Our might, lo! They began to fly* (21:12): that is, they began to escape. He continues: *Do not fly (now) and come back to where you lived luxuriously and to your dwellings; haply you will be questioned* (21:13). Thereafter, when the punishment came to them, *They said: O*

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration.

woe to us! Surely we were unjust. And this ceased not to be their cry till We made them cut, stilled (21:14-15). I swear by God that verily this is an admonition and warning for you, if you were to be admonished and warned.[1]

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1 *Rawḍat al-kāfi*.

Verses 16-33

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لاعِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهْواً
لاتَّخَذْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا إِنْ كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾ بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا
هُوَ زَاهِقٌ وَلَكُمْ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ وَمَنْ
عِنْدَهُ لا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَلا يَسْتَحْسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾ يُسَبِّحُونَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ
لا يَفْتُرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾ أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا آلِهَةً مِنْ الأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنشِرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلاَّ
اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ لا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ
وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ هَذَا ذِكْرُ مَنْ مَعِي
وَذِكْرُ مَنْ قَبْلِي بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لا يَعْلَمُونَ الْحَقَّ فَهُمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ
قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلاَّ نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ
وَلَداً سُبْحَانَهُ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾ لا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾
يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلاَّ لِمَنْ ارْتَضَى وَهُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَتِهِ
مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَذَلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي
الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾ أَوَلَمْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقاً
فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الأَرْضِ
رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجاً سُبُلاً لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا
السَّمَاءَ سَقْفاً مَحْفُوظاً وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ
وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(21:16) *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for sport.*

(21:17) *Had We wished to make a diversion, We would have made it from before Ourselves—if We were to do (so).*

(21:18) *Nay! We hurl the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes; and woe to you for what you describe;*

(21:19) *And whoever is in the heavens and the earth is His; and those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary.*

(21:20) *They glorify (Him) by night and day; they are never languid.*

(21:21) *Or have they taken gods from the earth who raise (the dead)?*

(21:22) *If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder; therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him).*

(21:23) *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they shall be questioned.*

(21:24) *Or, have they taken gods besides Him? Say: Bring your proof; this is the reminder of those with me and the reminder of those before me. Nay! most of them do not know the truth, so they turn aside.*

(21:25) *And We did not send before you any but We revealed to him that there is no god but Me; therefore, serve Me.*

(21:26) *And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. Nay! They are honored servants.*

(21:27) *They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His command do they act.*

(21:28) *He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of, and for fear of Him they tremble.*

(21:29) *And whoever of them should say: Surely I am a god besides Him, such a one do We recompense with Hell; thus do We recompense the unjust.*

(21:30) *Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, but We have opened them; and We have made of water everything living; will they not then believe?*

(21:31) *And We have made great mountains in the earth lest it might be convulsed with them, and We have made in it wide ways that they may follow a right direction.*

(21:32) *And We have made the heaven a guarded canopy and (yet) they turn aside from its signs.*

(21:33) *And He it is Who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon; all (orbs) travel along swiftly in their celestial spheres.*

Introduction

These verses begin by justifying the punishment of the unjust nations before by stating that God's creation was not an act of sport. God was not amusing Himself by creating the heavens, the earth and what is between them. Thus, human beings are not left with their own desires to act as they please and play as they wish, without being held to account for their deeds. On the contrary, they were created to return to their Lord and be reckoned and requited in accordance with their deeds, meaning that they are accountable servants. If they transgress the bound of servitude, they will be punished as divine wisdom dictates. Verily God is on the watch.

Since this justification is itself a proof for Resurrection, the verses turn to the topic of the Hereafter and arguments that prove the Resurrection. They also include arguments for prophethood in the light of that, because prophethood is a necessary requirement of serving God, and is concomitant to the truth of Resurrection. These verses involve an innovative explanation to prove the Resurrection, and they leave no room for any possible arguments against the Resurrection, as you shall see below. The first two verses link the theme of the previous set of verses to what follows next.

Commentary

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لاعِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾ لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهْواً لاتَّخَذْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا إِنْ كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(21:16-17) ***And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for sport*** **(lāʿibīna, from laʿib).** ***Had*** **(law)** ***We wished to make a diversion*** **(lahwan)*****, We would have made it from before Ourselves—if We were to do (so).***

The two verses explain [why] punishment came down upon the iniquitous towns, the demolition of which God mentioned above [21:11]. Following the context of the previous verses, these verses are at the same time a demonstrative proof for the truth of Resurrection, and in the light of that the truth of prophethood—which is the primary aim and theme of the verses in this chapter.

A summary of the previous set of verses is: There will be a resurrection in which people's deeds will be reckoned. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between good and evil, and between righteous and unrighteous deeds through divine guidance, and that would be a true call that hinges on prophethood. Were it not for that, creation would be futile and God would be sporting and amusing Himself through it. Far be He from that.

As you can see, the two verses are structured as an argument to prove the reality of Resurrection in order to then prove the truth of the prophetic call, because the prophetic call is a necessary implication of the Resurrection, but not vice versa.

The argument of the two verses, as one can see, depends on the concepts of *laʿib* (sport) and *lahw* (distraction, diversion). *Laʿib* is a coherent act that has an imaginary purpose without any real goal to it, such as the games that children play. The results of their games—such as taking the lead, falling behind, making a profit, incurring a loss, winning and losing—are things that are limited to their imagination. They are all based on supposition and fantasy. In the sense that *laʿib* attracts one's attention to it and distracts the soul from real works, it is also an example of *lahw* (distraction, diversion).

If the creation of the world that we see were not pursuing any purpose, it would imply that God simply continues to bring things to existence and then to non-existence, to give life and then death, to build and then destroy, without any purpose consequential to these actions and without any goal behind these acts. This would mean that God does these acts only for the sake of doing them; to see these beings and stages come one after another; all to keep Himself busy with these acts, to dispel frustration, boredom and idleness from Himself, to flee from loneliness, and as a means of coming out from seclusion. That would be like us when we take up an activity in order to amuse and engage ourselves, as a solution to get rid of some discomfort, deficiency or unpleasant feeling that bothers us such as boredom, fatigue, idleness, failure and so on.

Given the above, *laʿib* (sport, game, play) is also *lahw* (diversion, amusement) from one point of view. That is why we see that He refers in the first verse to "sport": *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for sport* (21:16), but then changes it to "diversion" in the second verse, which serves as a justification for the first verse. He has exchanged diversion for sport to complete the argument.

There is no sensible meaning for God's distraction and amusement by His creation. That is impossible because diversion is what a person engages in so as to solve a problem and fulfill a need. Hence, it is an effective cause with regards to the person. However, it makes no sense for His creation to have an effect on Him, and for Him to be in need of something that is dependent on Himself in every respect. Thus, hypothetically speaking, *if* He were to distract Himself with a diversion, it would not be permissible for it to be something *external* to His Self [that is, His Essence]. His creation is His act and work, which is external to His Self, while God's diversion cannot be by anything external to His Essence.

This completes the argument that God did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them for sport or diversion; He did not create them in vain and without any aim or purpose to them. This is why He says: *Had We wished to make a diversion, We would have made it from before Ourselves* (21:17).

As for diverting Himself with something not external to His Essence, that is also inherently impossible because it would necessitate a need in His Self for something that would distract and divert Him from what He finds in His Self. This entails that His Essence is composed of a real need within itself and something that fulfills and removes that need. However, there cannot be any deficiency or need in His Holy essence. Yet, the argument in these verses does not depend on this [that is, God's essential absoluteness and sufficiency]. Instead, the verses embark upon a proof that there is no sport or diversion in His *action*, meaning in His creation. As for there being no sport or diversion in His *Essence*, that is beyond the purpose of these verses. Verse 21:17 has negated this possibility only indirectly by using the word *law* (lit. "if," but specifically used for an impossible condition) which shows impossibility. This is then reinforced again by saying: *if We were to do (so)* (21:17). Contemplate this.

Given the above explanation, it should be clear that *Had We wished…* (21:17) is meant to justify the negation in *And We did not create…* (21:16). Also, *from before Ourselves* (21:17) means: in Our selves; in the stage of Our essence as opposed to the stage of creation which belongs to Our actions and is external to Our essence. Then, *if We were to do (so)* (21:17) is a further independent reference to what is implied by the word *law* [at the beginning of the sentence], meant as a form of emphasis.

With this exposition, the argument is completed for the Resurrection

and subsequently for prophethood, and these verses are linked to the previous thread. The gist of the verses is: People will return to God and be reckoned for their deeds to be requited for them by either reward or punishment. Thus, there should necessarily be prophethood and a call that guides the people to what will be the basis of their requital in terms of belief and action. Therefore, the Resurrection is what gives purpose to creation, and it in turn entails prophethood. If there were no Resurrection, there would be no aim or purpose to creation, and creation would be a sport and diversion on His part, which is impossible. If it were possible for Him to take up a diversion, it would have to be something within His Self, not something through His creation which is His action and external to His Self. This is because it is impossible for something other than Him to have an effect on Him, and for Him to need something besides Himself in any way. Because creation is not sport, there is a purpose for it—namely Resurrection, which itself implicates prophethood. Resurrection also comes with the punishment of some wrongdoers for their transgression and trespass, which requires the revival of the truth. That is why the next verse says: *Nay! We hurl the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes* (21:18).

Here are some other interpretations by the exegetes for: *Had We wished to make a diversion, We would have made it from before Ourselves* (21:17):

> *From before Ourselves* (min ladunnā) means "by Our power (*qudrah*)." The meaning would be: "If We wished to take up a diversion, We would have done so by Our power because it is above everything; however, We do not wish to do so." The negation is understood from the term *law* which indicates impossibility. This summarizes the view offered in *al-Kashshāf*.

The problem with this interpretation is that "power" is not applicable to impossibilities. Diversion means something that distracts one from what concerns the person in one way or another, and this is impossible for Him. Furthermore, it is not clear how "from before Ourselves" refers to God's power.

> *From before Ourselves* means "from Our presence such that no one sees it," because that would be a defect that should preferably remain hidden.

The problem with this view is that one hides a defect out of fear of being criticized for it. Fear is a characteristic of one who has some

weakness, not One Who has power over all things. If God can remove one defect through diversion, then He should also be able to remove another defect [that is, that of fear of blame] in its own appropriate way. Furthermore, if it is impossible for Him to *show* [a desire for] diversion because it is a defect, then it should be impossible for Him to *have* a deficiency in the first place. The impossibility of *having* an imperfection takes precedence over the impossibility of its *disclosure*. The above interpretation ultimately means: "If We did that impossible thing, We would hide it from you because showing it is impossible." This statement is obvious self-contradictory.

> *Lahw* (diversion, amusement) means "wife and children." Arabs call wife and children *lahw* because they are a source of relief and composure, and *lahw* (diversion, amusement) has the same effect on the soul. The meaning is: "If We wanted to take up a wife and a child, or one of the two, then We would take one from among those who are closest to Us (*al-muqarrabūn*)." This meaning is similar to His words: *If Allah desired to take a son to Himself, He will surely choose those He pleases from what He has created* (39:4). Some have interpreted this as follows: "Had we wanted a wife and/or child, We would take one of the sublime non-material beings, not one of the lowly bodies or corporeal beings." Others have interpreted: "We would take one of pure houris [of Paradise]." Either way, the verse would be a response to Christians and those who believe that God has a spouse and a child, namely Mary and Christ.

The problem with this interpretation is that even if its claimed lexical meaning [of *lahw*] is true, it disconnects the verse from the thread of the previous verses.

> *From before Ourselves* means "on Our part," meaning a divine diversion that is wise [in reality and from Our point of view], although it may seem to be vainness and diversion from your point of view. Such a divine diversion would be nothing but wisdom. It is equivalent to saying, "Even if We wanted to take up a diversion, it would be impossible." In short: What is on His part can only be wise and significant. If He wished diversion, even that would turn out to be something wise and significant. In other words, it is impossible that He would ever wish diversion.

The problem with this view is that although it is inherently correct and subtle, it is clearly not the apparent meaning that is understood from the wording of the verse.

… if We were* (in kunnā) *to do (so): The Arabic particle *in* is apparently conditional (meaning "if") as we said above. Its apodosis[1] is omitted but understood from His words: *We would have made it from before Ourselves* (21:17). Some exegetes have suggested that the Arabic particle *in* here is a negative particle, and this phrase [at the end of the verse] is a conclusion of the first part of the verse. Others have answered that *in* as a negative particle is normally used with *illā* [which is not the case here]. Based on our explanations above, it should be clear that using a conditional article *in* is more expressive in this context than a negative one.[2]

بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ ۚ وَلَكُمُ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(21:18) ***Nay! We hurl* (naqdhifu, from qadhf) *the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head* (fa-yadmaghuhu, from damgh)*, and lo! It vanishes* (zāhiq, from zuhūq)*; and woe to you for what you describe;***

Qadhf means "to cast and throw far." *Damgh,* according to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, means "to split and cut the head to the brain." One says *damaghahu*, *yadmaghuhu* when someone strikes another person's brain (*dimāgh*) [that is, a strike on the head that reaches the brain]. *Zuhūq* means "to die and perish." One says *zahaqa*, *yazhaqu* when something perishes.

Truth and falsehood are two opposing concepts. Truth is a fixed entity whereas falsehood does not have a fixed entity, but it looks like the truth such that one would mistake it. Then, when the two confront each other, truth remains while falsehood perishes. It is like water, which is a real thing, versus a mirage, which is not really water, but looks like it in the sight of the onlooker. One who is thirsty thinks that it is water—*until, when he comes to it, he finds it to be naught* [24:39].

God has enumerated several examples and applications of truth and

1 The main clause of a conditional sentence. (Ed.)

2 In other words, the particles *in* and *law* in this verse both mean "if" and emphasize the same meaning. If the particle *in* is negative, then the meaning would be: *Had We wished to make a diversion, We would have made it from before Ourselves; but by no means would We do (so)*. (Trans.)

falsehood in His Book. He has referred to beliefs that match the reality as truth, and to other beliefs as falsehood. He has referred to the life of the Hereafter as truth, and to the life of this world—along with everything that humankind assumes to possess and strives to acquire, such as its kingdom, wealth, power, children, supporters and so on—as falsehood. He has referred to His transcendent essence as truth, and to all other means and forces besides Him—which deceive the people to rely on them—as falsehood. There are numerous verses on these which would be too long to cite here.

That which is primarily attributable to God is the truth, not falsehood. He says: *The truth is from your Lord* (2:147, 3:60), and: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in falsehood* (38:27).

Falsehood cannot be attributed to God in the sense that it is falsehood. In other words, He cannot be deemed as the source and backbone of it. Rather, falsehood is a necessary consequence of limitation and deficiency in certain things when they are compared against something that is more perfect. For example, false beliefs are a consequence of deficiency in understanding. Similarly, all other false things are a consequence of things when they are compared against something more perfect. They are only attributable to Him by way of "permission" (*idhn*). For instance, He has created the earth with smooth saline lands that seem like water in the vision of an onlooker in terms of color and clarity. This creation of His is a "permission" from Him for the occurrence of a mirage—which is an illusion in one's imagination.

The above should clarify that there is nothing in existence unadulterated by falsehood apart from God.[1] He is a truth without any mix of falsehood. There is no way for falsehood to reach Him. He says: *Allah is the evident Truth*. (24:25).

This also shows that the entire system of creation is a mixture of truth and falsehood. He says, setting forth the parable of creation: *He sends down water from the clouds, then watercourses flow (with water) according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam, and from what they melt in the fire for the sake of making ornaments or apparatuses, arises a scum like it; thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood; then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which*

1 The reason for this is that everything other than God has some aspect of limitation and deficiency. (Trans.)

profits the people, it tarries in the earth (13:17). There is much knowledge underlying this parable.

It has been God's custom to grant respite to falsehood until it confronts the truth and comes to invalidate and destroy it. At that point He casts the truth at falsehood and falsehood perishes. True beliefs are never eradicated even if those who bear them are sometimes few or weak. True perfection never dies out at the root even if its opponents are many. God's assistance never misses His messengers even if the state of affairs may lead them to despair and to think that they have been rejected. This is what He means by saying: *Nay! We hurl the truth against falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes* (21:18). This statement is a transition from the idea that the creation of the universe was not for sport, nor did God want to take up a diversion by so doing, as implied by the last verse: *Had We wished to make a diversion…* (21:17).

The use of the present continuous verb *naqdhifu* (We hurl) shows that this is an ongoing custom of God. The expression "*We hurl… so that it breaks its head*" indicates the truth's supremacy and elevation above falsehood.[1] *And lo! It vanishes*: This indicates the unexpectedness and suddenness of the casting. It occurs when it is least expected for the truth to overcome and falsehood to be defeated.

The verse does not qualify or restrict truth and falsehood to arguments, conduct, customs or creation. There is no reason why the unconditional sense of the verse should be restricted to any of these aspects.

The meaning is: We have not created the world for sport, and We did not want to take up a diversion. On the contrary, it is Our custom to hurl the truth at the falsehood such that it is suddenly destroyed with total loss and disappearance. If falsehood is an argument or belief, then the true argument will refute it. If falsehood is an action or a custom—like the practice of the people in iniquitous and extravagant towns—then exterminatory punishment will eradicate and defeat it. And if falsehood is something else, then the truth will be something else [in accord to that].

Some exegetes have interpreted the verse as: "We do not wish to take up a diversion. Rather, it is Our concern to make truth prevail over falsehood, and part of this is the prevailing of earnestness over diversion." This, however, is wrong, because it implicitly acknowledges the *existence*

1 This is because the expression corresponds to the truth being cast from *above* onto the *head* of falsehood. (Trans.)

of diversion, while the previous verse only talked about the *ascription* of diversion to God—which He negated from Himself. The truth is that the verse is not *applicable* to the idea of earnestness vs. diversion because God's diversion has no existence so that the verse would apply to it and its opposite [that is, His earnestness].

… and woe to you for what you describe: Given our explanation of the context above, this is a threat to those who deny the Resurrection and it clearly refers to the return to God.

It means: He continues to cast the truth at falsehood and thereby establishes the truth and purifies it from the falsehood which adulterates it or hides it, until nothing remains except sheer truth. That is God, Who is the Truth, as He says: *And they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth* (24:25). On that day, all independent effects that were thought to belong to the apparent causes and what was claimed to belong to other-than-Him in terms of power, possession and authority, will all fade away. As He says: *Certainly the ties between you are now cut off and what you asserted is gone from you* (6:94); *That the power is wholly Allah's* (2:165); *To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer* (*of all*) (40:16); *And the command on that day shall be entirely Allah's* (82:19). There are many more verses that convey the same meaning.

وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَلَا يَسْتَحْسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(21:19) ***And whoever is in the heavens and the earth is His; and those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary.***

This refutes a possible argument against the Resurrection, namely that He may not be in charge of some or all of the people, so those who are not owned by Him are saved from returning to Him and from being reckoned and requited. The verse answers this by saying that His ownership is universal, covering everything in the heavens and earth. He has full authority to dispose of them however He wishes.

This is obviously about real ownership which is concomitant to His creation of things. What has been existentiated relies on its Existentiator for its existence, and thus it has no escape from His command and control. Bringing things into existence is exclusive to God. Nothing is a partner to Him in it, not even according to the idolaters who attest to other gods as

regulators and directors that should be worshiped. Thus, everyone in the heavens and earth belongs to God, not to any other owner.

***… and those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary* (lā yastaḥsirūna, from istiḥsār):** *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

> *Istiḥsār* means "to stop out of weariness." *Baʿīrun ḥasīrun* means "a weary camel." It is derived from the saying *ḥasara ʿan dhirāʿayhi* (he uncovered his forearms) which means: "he revealed his capacity by weariness" [that is, his demonstration of weariness showed that he has run out of strength].

"*Those who are with Him*" are those who are blessed with a special degree of proximity to God and feeling His presence. It may apply to the favored angels.

يُسَبِّحُونَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لَا يَفْتُرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(21:20) ***They glorify (Him) by night and day; they are never languid.***

This serves as an interpretation of: *nor do they grow weary* (21:19). It means: They are not overcome by weariness and exhaustion; on the contrary, they glorify God by night and day without any lassitude. Glorifying "by night and day" is an allusion to their incessant glorification.

He describes the state of His favored servants and His honored angels as being immersed in servitude to Him, devotedly serving Him without any distraction or diversion. Apparently this description is meant to explain the exclusivity of His ownership and dominion mentioned at the beginning of the verse [21:19].

That is in contrast to the case of conventional lordship between human masters and servants. The custom there is that as servants advance and becomes closer to their master, the master lightens their load compared to the many duties and rites that are imposed upon his ordinary slaves, and exempts them from being held accountable and punished. That is because human societies and civilizations are based on cooperation through the exchange of benefits according to mutual need. All people are always in need, and a master needs those who are closest to him more than others, just as a king needs his closest courtiers more than others. As a master benefits more from some servants than others, he bestows more grace upon them, according to the benefits that he derives from their service. That is why he lifts up from them much of the burden that he requires from others, and excuses them from what others are held accountable for.

After all this is also a trade and exchange.

This is different from His Lordship over His servants, because His Lordship is a real one [as opposed to a conventional one], where the Owner is in no need of the owned whatsoever, while the owned is completely in need of the Owner. There is no difference in this regard whether a servant holds a position of proximity and has a high status or not. Not only that, but the more favored a servant is, the Master's greatness, grandeur, strength and glory will be more manifest to him, and he will feel his own lowliness, wretchedness and need more. This would cause him to immerse himself more in humble worship and submissive service.

It was mentioned previously [under verses 21:17-18] that His Lordship necessitates service, reckoning and retribution. Then, when it says, *and those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary* (21:19), it serves as a reference to the fact that His Lordship is different from common forms of ownership and lordship in human societies. Therefore, no one should want to be relieved from any aspect of duty, reckoning or requital.

It could also be that the sentence is an escalation in meaning. That is: Everyone in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. Thus they must serve Him, and they will all be reckoned without exception. That is why even His favored servants and His honored angels are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary of it. On the contrary, they glorify Him continuously and never cease.

We mentioned in the exegesis of the last verse of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf—*Surely those who are with your Lord are not too proud to serve Him, and they declare His glory and throw themselves down in humility before Him* (7:206)—that "those who are with your Lord" are not limited to the favored angels. Do not overlook this point!

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا آلِهَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنْشِرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(21:21) ***Or have they taken gods from the earth who raise (the dead)*** **(yunshirūna, from inshār)?**

Inshār is "to raise the dead"; that is, resurrection. This verse refutes another possible argument against the Resurrection and reckoning, and that is to reply to God's argument as follows: There are other gods apart from Him who resurrect the dead and reckon them. This means that Resurrection is not up to God and there is no reason why we should fear

Him and answer the call of His messengers and their followers. Rather we should worship these other gods, and there is no harm in doing so.

The verse talks about taking gods "from the earth." It is said that this qualification conveys another argument against them: Earthly gods are equally subject to the rules which apply to all people of the earth, which are death and then resurrection. So who would cause *them* to die then resurrect *them*?

It could also be that "from the earth" refers to "earthly material," meaning idols made of stone, wood or metals. This involves a sense of disparagement and derision. The implied meaning would be: The angels that they have adopted as gods are themselves servants and worshipers of God. Therefore, these people are cut off from them and should despair of receiving help from them as gods in afterlife. If so, would they then turn to earthly idols and figures as representations of transcendent lords and figures, and adopt them as gods besides God?

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا ۚ فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(21:22) ***If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder; therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him).***

We discussed in the exegesis of Sūrah Hūd[1] (and have repeatedly referred to it) that the disagreement between the polytheists and the monotheists was not over the unity or plurality of God as the Necessary Being Who exists because of His own essence and gives existence to everything else. There was no disagreement that the Necessary Being is One and has no partner. Instead, the disagreement was over the unity vs. plurality of God as a lord (*rabb*) and an object of worship (*maʿbūd*, *ilāh*). The polytheists believed that the different layers and divisions of the universe had been delegated to transcendent beings by God, and those are the ones who should be worshiped so that they would intercede for their servants before God and bring them closer to Him.[2] Thus they believed in other gods like the lord of the heavens, the lord of the earth, the lord of humankind and so on. They are gods for inferior beings [like human beings], while God is the God of gods and the Creator of everything. He says regarding

1 Under verses 11:36-49. (Trans.)

2 See verses 10:18 and 39:3. (Trans.)

what they say: *And if you should ask them who created them, they would certainly say: Allah* (43:87); and *And if you should ask them, Who created the heavens and the earth? They would most certainly say: The Mighty, the Knowing One, has created them* (43:9).

It is in this sense that this noble verse negates gods-other-than-God in the heaven and the earth [that is, as directors of affairs and as lords that should be worshiped], not in the sense of being creators that have brought things to existence, because no one believed in multiple gods in this sense. Also, what it means by being a god *in* the heaven and *in* the earth is being a god whose divine authority *applies* to the heaven and the earth, not being a god who *resides* in them. This is similar to His words: *And He it is Who is Allah in the heavens and Allah in the earth* (43:84).

The verse's argument can be presented as follows: (a) Real multiplicity is when two or more things differ from one another in terms of their essence and reality. Therefore, if the universe had more than one god, then they would be distinct from each other in terms of essence and reality. (b) This distinction of essence and reality would entail distinction and difference in how they manage and direct the universe, which would spoil the order of the heavens and earth [that is, the universe]. (c) However, the different parts and aspects of the system in place in the universe are consistent, ordered and compatible with one another, all serving the same goal.[1] (d) Hence, the universe does not have more than one god. This is the desired conclusion.[2]

You might object: This is not true, because we already witness disorder in the world due to the competing causes and forces that prevent the acts and effects of one another.

The answer is: Two causes thwarting each other under *two different* forms of management is not the same as them vying with one another under the *same* system, where one factor may limit the effect of another, and where the end result is the sum total of both. This latter scenario is the case of the competing causes in the system which governs the universe. Even though the means and causes that constitute the general system of

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1 This part of the argument—that is, negation of disorder—is implicit in the verse. It is stated explicitly in 67:3-4. (Trans.)

2 This argument is in the form of *modus tollens*, which disproves a statement by denying its consequence. (Trans.)

the world compete, interfere and go against one another, they do not cancel the effect and function of one another such that the general rules that govern the whole system are nullified. It is never the case that the impact of a cause is lost or canceled despite the realization of all conditions and the removal of all impediments. That would be the case if there were two regulators, and one cancelled the act of the other. Instead, two contending causes are akin to the scales on a balance, which oppose one another in rising and falling. However, despite their opposition, they actually work together in achieving what the owner of the balance desires, which is measuring weights by the indication of the needle or pointer on the balance.

You might object: One can evidently see that the system in place in the universe is governed by a wise and knowledgeable director. In other words, the Lord of the universe regulates it on the basis of knowledge. If this is the case, then why is not possible to presume that there are multiple gods who have arrived at a logical agreement amongst themselves to regulate the affairs of the universe without any interference or thwarting one another to maintain its welfare and order?

The answer is: This is inconceivable because acting logically means acting according to what rational laws dictate such that all the different aspects of one's action would be in harmony and would lead to the desired goal. These rational laws are derived from *external realities* and the system which governs them. Thus, our rational acts *follow* logical rules, which are in turn deduced from the real world outside. However, when talking about a lord who is the regulator of the universe, the outside world is his very act and the rational rules in turn follow that. Hence, it is logically impossible for His actions to follow the rational rules because the rational rules are subsequent to and dependent on his actions. Contemplate this.

The above was an account of the verse's argument which is a demonstrative proof composed of definite premises. It proves that the general system governing the universe—with all the specific systems and regulations within it—issues from a single source and involves no inconsistency. The exegetes, however, have interpreted the verse's argument as being a refutation of there being more than one *creator*. Then they have elaborated this in different ways and have plunged into discussion, sometimes adding premises that are not deducible from the text of the verse. One exegete has claimed that the verse's argument is rather a persuasive one (*iqnāʿiyyah*) not a demonstrative one (*burhāniyyah*); that is, it is an argument intended

to persuade and convince the masses.

… therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him) **(ʿammā yaṣifūna)*:*** This is to clear and glorify God of what they attribute to Him, which is the idea that there are other gods with Him who raise the dead, or that there are other gods besides Him in charge of regulating His Kingdom. The word "Throne" represents His dominion. The particle *mā* (lit. "what") in *ʿammā* ("of what") is *maṣdariyyah* (that is, it turns the subsequent verb into an infinitive).[1] Therefore, *ʿammā yaṣifūna* means "above their attribution." There is more to come on this subject below.

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(21:23) ***He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they shall be questioned.***

The pronoun "he" in *He is not questioned* undoubtedly refers to God. The pronoun "they" in *they shall be questioned* could refer to either their worshiped gods, both the gods and the people, or only the people. The first possibility is the most plausible one given the context, because the discussion above was about the gods that they worship instead of Him. These gods will be held accountable, whereas God cannot be held accountable for what He does.

Questioning one concerning what he has done means asking him, "Why did you do this?" It means asking about the benefit, advantage or welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) of an act. Otherwise, if it is known that an action is beneficial, then rational agents would not ask about it. Now, God is absolutely Wise—as He has described Himself in numerous places in His Book—it means that there is certainly an outweighing benefit and wisdom in whatever He does. A necessary implication of this is that it is not meaningful to question such an actor about what He does, unlike others. In the case of others, what they do may be possibly right or wrong, and may involve either benefit or harm. Hence it is possible to question them about their actions. If there is no justifiable benefit or wisdom behind their actions, they would be condemned by reason and perhaps penalized for it.

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1 The translation "above what they attribute" also reduces to the same meaning. The overall message is: "God is far above their act of attribution." Also note that *ʿammā* is a contraction of two particles: *ʿan-mā*. (Trans.)

This is what a number of exegetes have said in interpreting the verse. Overall, it is a sound explanation, but there remain two issues with it:

(1) The verse is unqualified and there is no evidence in the text of the verse that would restrict it to this meaning. Even if a meaning is correct in its own right, it does not entail that it is the intent of the verse.

That is why some exegetes have said: *He is not questioned concerning what He does* shows that His actions are not explicable and justifiable by *gharaḍ* (purpose, objective, goal). A purpose (*gharaḍ*) is what drives a subject to do an act in order to achieve a type of perfection and benefit from it. However, He is too sublime to need anything external to Himself, or to become perfect by drawing any benefit from anyone else. Hence one cannot ask Him "Why did you do so?" as a question about the purpose that aroused Him to an action.

Some exegetes have refuted the above claim by saying that the acts of a perfect agent emanate from him due to his very essence. His goal is his own essence and there is no purpose beyond himself for his actions. For instance, a miserly person has to practice donating repeatedly in order to achieve a disposition of generosity, but once that became second nature, donations would issue forth from the person due to his new inherent disposition, not in order to achieve a goal by this act.

For this reason some other exegetes have interpreted the verse as follows: His Greatness, Magnificence and Might render everything powerless to ask about His actions or to object to Him regarding anything related to His will. All other beings are too insignificant and abject to even consider asking about His actions or reproaching Him for what He does. He, on the other hand, is entitled to ask any doer about what they have done and punish anyone who deserves to be punished.

This explanation again is refuted because there is a difference between not being questioned due to people being scared of His might—as in the case of tyrannical rulers and despotic pharaohs—and not being questioned because of His action being completely free from any flaw, defect or shortcoming. What is understood from His Book in general is the latter not the former. For example He says: *Who made good everything that He has created* (32:7); *His are the most excellent names* (59:24); and: *Surely Allah does not do any injustice to people* (10:44).

In short, the interpretation that He is not questionable about His actions because He is absolutely Wise means that His actions are not

subject to question due to something *other* than the very actions; something *external* to them. He is not questioned about His actions not because of any inherent merit in His actions per se, but because there is an overweighing benefit and wisdom in what He does, for He is a Wise Actor. The text of the verse—*He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they shall be questioned*—bears no indication that it should be restricted to wisdom. Therefore, those who have interpreted the verse according to God's wisdom should provide evidence for this qualification and restriction.

If we were to look outside this phrase for evidence to explain the inapplicability of questions to God, then the closest phrase would be the last part of the previous verse: *Therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him)* (21:22). This sentence ascribes absolute dominion and kingdom to God.[1] A king's command should be followed because he is a king. That is, his orders are binding inherently and due to his essence [which, in this case, means his position as a ruler], not because they conform to some overweighing benefit and wisdom. Otherwise there would be no difference between Him and the lowest of his citizens, because at the end of the day it would be that aspect of welfare, benefit and interest that would determine what is binding and authoritative. If that were the case, then in some cases it would not be mandatory to obey the ruler [that is, in cases where there is no overweighing benefit in his orders]. Similarly, a human master is followed and obeyed by his slave *because* of his position as a master. The slave has no right to question him about the benefit and wisdom behind his orders. This is because lordship and ownership in general grant the owner the right to manage, rule and manipulate what he owns as he wishes.

God is the Lord and Owner of everything; all things are His absolute property. He is entitled to do as He pleases and rule as He wishes, while no one else has such right. He is entitled to question them concerning what they do but no one is entitled to question Him concerning what He does. At the same time, He has told us that He is Wise and whatever He does and wishes is only that which is wise, beneficial and good. Hence, we should not even suspect any evil in the actions that are attributable to Him based on our overall knowledge of His absolute wisdom, let alone questioning Him concerning what He does. A very elegant verse that

1 The concept of *mulk* (dominion, kingdom, sovereignty) is implied by the word "Throne." (Trans.)

points to this idea what is narrated from Jesus son Mary: *If Thou should chastise them, then surely they are Thy servants; and if Thou should forgive them, then surely You are the Mighty, the Wise* (5:118). The verse explains and justifies their chastisement on the account of their being His property, and His forgiveness on the account of His being Wise.[1]

It should be clear that interpreting the verse based on God's wisdom is more general and less specific than interpreting it based on His Lordship and dominion. Thus, the latter is a more plausible explanation for: *He is not questioned concerning what He does* (21:23).

(2) Based on the above interpretation of the verse suggested by the exegetes [that is, interpreting the verse based on the wisdom and benefit in God's actions], the verse would have no clear connection to the previous thread of verses. The most they have said to show a connection is what is mentioned in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*: "Since God explained His oneness (*tawḥīd*) above, He now turns to explaining His justice (*ʿadl*)." However, the reader would agree that this boils down to the verse being a separate statement on the side, while there is no need to take it as such. Similarly it is narrated from Abū Muslim:

This verse is linked to what He says in the beginning of the chapter: *Their reckoning has drawn near to men…* (21:1). "Reckoning" there means questioning them about what God bestowed upon them, to see whether they were grateful or ungrateful for His blessings.

The problem with this view is that the following verses are clearly connected to the verses that came before, so it would make no sense for a single verse in the middle to be connected to the beginning of the chapter. Moreover, even if we accept this connection, it would only explain the connection of the second half of the verse [that is, "*but they shall be questioned*"] but not the first.

Meanwhile, you would agree that explaining the verse according to God's dominion as opposed to His wisdom would clearly link the verse to what precedes it: *Therefore glory be to Allah, the Lord of the Throne* (al-ʿarsh), *above what they attribute (to Him)* (21:22). As we mentioned above, "the Throne" (*al-ʿarsh*) represents dominion and rule, which connects the two verses. In fact, this verse—*He is not questioned concerning*

1 That is: You have every right to punish them because they are servants and slaves that belong to You; and if You forgive them, then that is also undoubtedly wise. (Trans.)

what He does, but they shall be questioned (21:23)—is a proof for His all-encompassing dominion. Similarly, His dominion and the inapplicability of questions to Him are a proof for His Lordship and ownership of everyone and everything as His property. Finally, the facts that they are owned by God and are accountable to Him prove that they are not lords.

An agent (*fāʿil*) who cannot be questioned about what he does whatsoever must be one who is entitled to act as he wills. On the other hand, an agent who is accountable for his actions is one who does not have the authority to act unless it is according to some benefit and advantage (*maṣlaḥah*). Therefore, it is that benefit [and not the agent] which rules over the act and removes accountability and blameworthiness from it. This is while the Lord of the universe—or a lord of anything in the world—inherently has independent dominion over what He owns by virtue of His Essence, not due to being given rule by someone else. Thus God is the Lord of the Throne (that is, dominion), and everything else is subject to Him.

Philosophical and Qur'anic Discussion: God's Wisdom and the Meaning of His Actions Being Beneficial

The various activities that we do count as our "actions" (sing. *fiʿl*) are considered to be our actions only if they are linked to our will and volition in one way or another. That is why our health, our sickness, and our involuntary motion via the earth's daily or annual motion are not deemed to be our acts. Undoubtedly, having a will and intention to do something necessitates having knowledge of its significance and realizing that it will be a perfection for us—meaning that doing the act is better than not doing it, and that its benefits overweighs its harms. The aspect of good that exists in an act is what makes its performance outweigh its non-performance and motivates us to do it. This is what causes an actor (*fāʿil*) to do an act (*fiʿl*), and this is what we call an actor's goal and purpose (*ghāyah*, *gharaḍ*) in his act. It has been decisively proven by metaphysical arguments that what issues from an actor—whether it is voluntary or involuntary—is never free of some purpose.

The *maṣlaḥah* (welfare, benefit, advantage) of an act is its property of involving some aspect of good that is achieved when the act is done. What rational agents—that is, human subjects—consider to be a *maṣlaḥah* is that which motivates the doer to do an act. This is what justifies an act and makes its doer count as wise in his action. Without a *maṣlaḥah*, the

act would be vain and fruitless.

Obviously the *maṣlaḥah* that results from an action does not exist before the action. Therefore it is rather the mental existence of the *maṣlaḥah* in the mind of the actor—as opposed to its external existence—which motivates the person to perform the act. We have a mental image taken from the external world, including the universal rules and principles that dictate how actions lead to results and consequences. We also have some experience from how things are linked together. Undoubtedly this map of knowledge in our mind is a function of the external system of the universe and consequential to it.

Then, we try to make our specifically voluntary acts conform to our mental map, aiming for the desired benefits as dictated by our knowledge. Hence, if our act matches our knowledge [and we achieve our desired benefit], then we are considered to be wise in our action. If our knowledge does not match the desired objective in the external world and we fail to hit our target due to a mistake (whether or not we can be held responsible for it), then we would be seen as foolish, ignorant and so on.

Thus, wisdom is a quality of an actor whose actions conform to a map of knowledge which corresponds to the external system of universe. Similarly, one's action involves *maṣlaḥah* if it matches the mental map that is in concordance with the external world. Hence, wisdom is first and foremost an attribute of the external world, and it applies to a person or his act only in the sense that it *corresponds* to the external world by the mediation of his knowledge. Likewise, an action has *maṣlaḥah* in the sense that it is based on a mental map that resembles the outside world.

The above is only applicable to actions that are done in correspondence to external reality. As for an actions that are the very external reality—that is, God's acts—they are wisdom itself. There is nothing beyond them—no external "wisdom"—to which they would correspond. There is *maṣlaḥah* in His action in the sense that benefit and welfare *follows it*, not that *it follows* some [previously existent] benefit and welfare that arouses and motivates Him to act. This should be clear to the reader.

Every actor apart from Him can be questioned concerning what he does by: "Why did you do this act?" This question asks the person to explain how his action corresponds to the external world based on his mental map, and to state the benefit that motivated him to perform the act. As for Him, such a question is not applicable to His action because

His action is the external reality itself—to which other acts are expected to correspond. There is no other external system to correspond to. It is in fact God's action that one's mental map uses to come up with an idea of what is beneficial and desirable—that is, *maṣlaḥah*—which will then arouse and motivate one to action. As we said, there is no other system that governs His act such that a mental idea of benefit would come from there and then motivate God's action.

Some scholars have said:

God has detailed knowledge of all things before bringing them into being. However, knowledge of something is consequential to the existence of the known. Thus, all things must have a certain subsistence (*thubūt*) within themselves before they are brought into being, and that subsistence is the object of God's knowledge. At that level of subsistence, things have certain good, evil, benefits and potentialities if they were to come to being. God knows these; then He effuses existence upon them accordingly.

This view is not correct because it suffers from a few problems:

(1) It assumes that His detailed knowledge of things before their existence is acquired knowledge. The invalidity of this has been demonstrated in its own place. On the contrary, His knowledge is presential knowledge. It is not subsequent and consequent to the known, but rather vice versa.

(2) Subsistence (*thubūt*) prior to existence (*wujūd*) is inconceivable because existence goes hand in hand with thingness (*shayʾiyyah*). Something which does not exist is not a thing, and that which is not a thing does not subsist.[1]

(3) The supposition of any potentiality necessitates the supposition of an actuality that corresponds to it. Similarly, assuming some benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) at that level entails the existence of perfection and deficiency. All of these are external properties exclusive to things which existent externally. Hence, that which was assumed to subsist prior to being brought into existence would already have external existence, which is a contradiction. This is what one can say based on rational arguments, and it is supported by the Qur'anic arguments.[2] For this discussion it is sufficient to quote

1 In other words, it does not make sense to say that something subsists but it does not exist. (Trans.)

2 The suggested view above can be modified and amended into the theory of Permanent Archetypes (*al-aʿyān al-thābitah*), which is about God's eternal knowledge of the quiddity and capacity of things. (Trans.)

His words: *And on the day He says: Be, it is. His word is the truth* (6:73). Here the word "Be" is what gives existence to things; that is, an existence that is tied to Him. But He describes "Be" as "His word" and says that "it is the truth" meaning that it is an external reality. Hence, His word is the very external existence of things, which is also His act. Thus, His word is His act, and the two are the external existence of things.

He also says: *The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the disputers* (3:60). "The truth" is a speech or belief that matches the external reality. The truth is first and foremost the external reality, and a speech is the truth due to its compliance and correspondence with that reality. However, the external reality is God's act, from which the true speech or belief is then deduced. Hence, the truth originates from Him and returns to Him. That is why He says "the truth is *from* your Lord" and not "the truth is *with* your Lord" as we do in disputes between ourselves, where we say "the truth is with so-and-so."

This should clarify why every action can be questioned except His. What one seeks in questioning an action is an explanation for how the action matches the truth. Such correspondence is only applicable when the action is something other than the truth itself. As for the truth itself, it is itself the truth without needing to match the truth.

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً ۖ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ ۖ هَٰذَا ذِكْرُ مَنْ مَعِيَ وَذِكْرُ مَنْ قَبْلِي ۗ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْحَقَّ ۖ فَهُمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(21:24) ***Or, have they taken gods besides Him? Say: Bring*** **(hātū)** ***your proof*** **(burhānakum)*****; this is the reminder*** **(dhikr)** ***of those with me and the reminder of those before me. Nay! most of them do not know the truth, so they turn aside.***

Hātū is a verbal noun (*ism al-fiʿl*) that means "bring it." *Burhān* is "a proof which produces knowledge." As can be inferred from the context, *dhikr* (reminder) means "divinely revealed Book." *The reminder of those with me* means the Qur'an that was revealed to him and which is a reminder for his nation until the Day of Resurrection. *The reminder of those before me* means the Books of the previous prophets such as the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and so on. "Reminder" could also mean

what has been revealed about divinity and worship. Thus, *the reminder of those with me* [or "the reminder that is with me"] would be the revelation that that was sent to him in the Qur'an, and *the reminder of those before me* would be the revelation that was sent to the previous prophets in this regard. According to both of these revelations, divinity and worship exclusively belong to God. Hence, the demonstrative pronoun "this"—in "*this is the reminder*"—refers to the Qur'an's content, which is the command to monotheism in worship. This command was revealed both to him and to the previous prophets. Some have interpreted "reminder" as "report" (*khabar*) and other meanings which should be dismissed.

This verse refutes another possible argument against the aforementioned Resurrection and reckoning. It was said that their return to God and His reckoning of their deeds necessitates that they worship God, submit to His guardianship and accept the call of His prophets. A counter-argument could be that they adopt and serve other gods instead of *Allah*, and thereby would be needless of serving Him. The refutation of this claim is that there is no proof for it. God argues against them by commanding the Prophet to ask them for a proof: *Say: Bring your proof*….

… Say: Bring your proof; this is the reminder of those with me and the reminder of those before me: This is an example of denying the rival's argument and at the same time providing a counter argument, as discussed in the art of debate. In brief, it is when one asks his rival to bring an argument for his unsupported claim, and backs this request by providing an argument against his opponent's claim.

He says to His Prophet: Say to those who adopt other gods instead of God: Bring your proof for your claim, because it is irrational to accept and rely on a claim for which there is no proof. The Prophet's basis for asking for a proof is that the heavenly books revealed by God do not agree with what their claim, but are opposed to it. The counter-argument is: Here, see the Qur'an and all other scriptures such as the Torah or Gospel—which are the reminder for those with me and the reminder for those before me: they all say that divinity exclusively belong to God and He is the only One Who must be worshiped. Put differently, the counter-argument is: What has been revealed concerning divinity and worship—including that which is revealed to me in the Qur'an, which is the reminder that is with me, and what was revealed to the prophets who preceded me, which is the reminder of those before me—says that God is the sole divinity and

He alone should be worshiped.

… Nay! most of them do not know the truth, so they turn aside: The address here is directed at the Prophet. He is told that most of them cannot differentiate between truth and falsehood; they are not people of distinction who only follow proof. That is why they turn away from the truth and its followers.

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وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(21:25) ***And We did not send before you any messenger but We revealed to him that there is no god but Me; therefore, serve Me.***

This reaffirms what was said in the previous verse, that "the reminder" states His unity and the necessity to serve Him alone. This verse supports the second of the two meanings offered above for "the reminder" (*al-dhikr*).[1]

… We revealed* (nūḥī) *to him that there is no god but Me; therefore, serve Me: The verb *nūḥī* [in the present continuous tense] shows that this revelation was ongoing and continuous. "*Therefore*, *serve Me*" is addressed to the messengers and their nations. The rest is clear.

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وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ وَلَدًا ۗ سُبْحَانَهُ ۚ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(21:26) ***And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son. Glory be to Him. Nay! They are honored servants.***

The context is evidence that the verse is quoting the idolaters' claim that the angels are the children of God. Thus, "honored servants" are the angels. God first clears Himself of this claim by saying: *subḥānahu* (glory be to Him, be it far from Him). He then states the reality of their condition by way of transition.

Here He describes them as "servants," and in the next verse He describes their excellence in servitude by stating the signs, effects, traits, characteristics and outcomes of their servitude: *They do not precede Him in speech…* (21:27). Hence, what is meant by their "honor" here is being honored by means of servitude, not because of something else. The meaning boils down to: They are servants in the real sense of servitude, and the evidence for this is that one can see the signs of perfect servitude in them.

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1 The first meaning offered for *dhikr* was "divinely revealed Book." The second meaning was "what has been revealed about divinity and worship." (Trans.)

All intelligent beings are God's "servants," but the angels are specifically called "servants" because they find it an honor within themselves to serve God; they do not see themselves as anything other than servants. What is meant by being "honored" is that God has honored them by bestowing perfect servitude upon them. This is similar to when a servant chooses to be purely for God (making him *mukhliṣ*, sincere), to which God responds by choosing him purely for Himself (making him *mukhlaṣ*, chosen). The difference between honor (*karāmah*) among angels and mankind is that honor is an acquired property among human beings but not among angels.[1] However, God's act of honoring (*ikrām*) is a matter of His grace and effusion for both creatures. Contemplate this.

لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(21:27) ***They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His command do they act.***

"Someone not preceding another in speech" means that one person does not say anything before the other person does; that is, one person follows the other person in what he says. This expression could be an allusion to will and wish, implying that a person's will is pursuant to another person's will. *According to His command* should have come after "they act," but it is mentioned earlier to indicate exclusivity. That is: "They act *only* according to His command, not according to anything else." It is not meant to say: "They act according to the command of Him alone, not according to the command of anyone else." In other words, in their actions they follow His command, just as in their speech they follow His speech. Hence, they are obedient to their Lord both in words and in action.[2]

Alternatively: Their will and their action are pursuant to His will—on the account that "speech" in the verse denotes will (*irādah*). Therefore, they do not want anything apart from what He wants, and do not do anything

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1 That is, human beings have to acquire honor through their effort and actions. (Trans.)

2 What the author is saying here is about the focus and emphasis of the verse. The central theme and message of the verse is not a comparison between God and others, but it is about their absolute devotion to God, such that every aspect of their life and being is submissive to Him. Otherwise, it is correct in its own place that "they act according to the command of Him alone, not according to the command of anyone else." (Trans.)

apart from what He wants. This is complete servitude, because servitude entails that a servant's will and actions belong to his master.

This is the apparent meaning of the verse, which assumes "command" (*amr*) to be the opposite of "prohibition" (*nahy*). It implies that angels do not know any prohibition, because prohibition is consequential to the possibility of performing a forbidden act, whereas they only act upon command.

The true meaning of God's command can be inferred from His words: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things, and to Him you shall be brought back* (36:82-83), and His words: *And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye* (54:50). We have already mentioned a few points about this in some of our previous discussions, and a full discussion about the Qur'an's view of the angels will follow.

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنِ ارْتَضَىٰ وَهُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(21:28) ***He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of, and for fear of Him they tremble.***

The exegetes have interpreted "*what is before them and what is behind them*" as their past and future acts. That is: "He knows what they have done so far and what they will be doing from now on." Based on this meaning, what is said here is a new statement that justifies the previous point that: *They do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His command do they act* (21:27). It is as if it is said: They do not say or do anything without His command because He knows everything that they have done and will do, and they constantly watch their affairs because they are aware of this.

This is a good explanation in and of itself, but it is suitable for justifying why they do not disobey, not why they only act according to God's command. The latter is what is required in this context.[1] Furthermore,

1 The above interpretation says that they do not disobey God's commands because they know they are under His watch. However, the message of the previous verse [21:27] was that they exclusively act in line with God's command, which is not exactly the same as a negation of their disobedience. As the author explains below, they do not take any step except according to

this interpretation assumes that they know that "*He knows what is before them and what is behind them*," but the verse bears no indication to this.

In the exegesis of the verse, *And we do not descend but by the command of your Lord; to Him belongs whatever is before us and whatever is behind us and whatever is between these, and your Lord is not forgetful* (19:64), it was stated that the best interpretation is that "whatever is before us" means the acts and effects that are subsequent to their existence, and "whatever is behind us" means the causes of their existence which take precedence to them and exist before them. If we interpret this verse in a like manner, then it would be a clear explanation for everything from *Nay! They are honored servants* until *(only) according to His command do they act* (21:26-27). This would explain why their essence, as well as the speeches and actions that emanate from their essence, are all noble and honored. The meaning would be: God has honored their essences and praised their works because He knows their deeds and words ("what is before them") as well as the cause and origin of their existence ("what is behind them"). It is similar to saying, "So-and-so has a noble character and praiseworthy conduct because his deeds are admirable and he is from a noble family."

… and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of: This concerns their intercession for others, which is what the idolaters depended upon in their worship of the angels. They used to say: *These are our intercessors with Allah* (10:18), and: *We do not serve them save that they may make us nearer to Allah* (39:3). God refutes them by saying that the angels only intercede for one whom God approves of, which refers to the approval of "one's religion" because He says elsewhere: *Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases* (4:48). This means that in order to be "approved of," one should believe in God without associating any partners with Him, as opposed to the idolaters who associated partners with Him. It is amazing that the partners whom they associated with God were the very same angels who intercede only for monotheists, not polytheists!

… and for fear of Him they tremble: That is: They fear His wrath and punishment in spite of being safe from it since they do not disobey Him. Since God is the One Who has secured them from His punishment by

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God's command because they are have a noble nature and conduct. (Trans.)

bestowing infallibility upon them, His power is not limited and His dominion is not wrested from His hand. Thus, He still has the same dominion after giving them security as He had before, and He has power over all things. This explanation also sets the meaning of the next verse right.

وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَٰهٌ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(21:29) ***And whoever of them should say: Surely I am a god besides Him, such a one do We recompense with Hell; thus do We recompense the unjust.***

That is: Whoever makes this claim is unjust and We will recompense him with Hell because that is the recompense of the unjust. The verse is a conditional proposition, and a conditional does not necessitate the occurrence of the condition.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ ۖ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(21:30) ***Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up*** **(ratqan)**, ***but We have opened them*** **(fa-fataqnāhumā, from fatq)**; ***and We have made of water everything living; will they not then believe?***

"Seeing" here means mental and intellectual observation. It is referred to as "seeing" (*ruʾyah*) because it is an evident observation that results from thinking about a tangible phenomenon.

Ratq and *fatq* are two opposites. Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *Ratq* means "joining and cleaving together, whether by nature and creation or by fashioning and manufacturing." He says: *were closed up, but We have opened them…* (21:30). *Fatq* means "separating two things that are joined together." It is the opposite of *ratq*.

The dual pronoun in *kānatā* ("were") refers to the heavens and the earth. The heavens are counted as one group and the earth as another group, so they compose two. The predicate *ratqan* ("closed up") is an infinitive (*maṣdar*) that is used an object (*mafʿūl*) in the verse. That is why it is in the singular form. The meaning is: These two were joined and connected together, but then We separated them.

This verse and the three which follow it are rational arguments for His exclusive Lordship over the entire universe. They are mentioned because

the previous discourse led to the topic of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and the negation of the gods that they had assumed instead of God and the angels whom they deemed to be His children. Their claims were based on the idea that God is the One Who has created and brought things into existence, the angels are responsible for lordship and direction of affairs. In response, in these verses God refers to certain creatures whose creation is blended with the direction of their affairs. This shows that direction and regulation are inseparable from creation, so He Who created them must also be the One Who regulates their affairs. In these verses God refers to the creation and condition of things such as the heavens, the earth, all living things, the mountains, the passages between the mountains, the night, the day, the sun and the moon.

Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, but We have opened them: Given the context, *those who disbelieve* are the idolaters. They made a separation between the creation and direction of affairs by attributing the former to God and the latter to other gods. Their error in this separation is made clear by drawing their attention to something that is beyond doubt: the opening up of the heavens and the earth after being closed up. Creation and direction are jointly present in this phenomenon, so how could it be that their creation is by one being and their direction by another?

We constantly see the detachment of earthly and atmospheric compounds from each other, the separation of different plant species from the earth as they grow, and the separation of animals from animals, and humans from humans, as they are born. We see that what is detached from another being develops into a new form with new properties and qualities that were not present previously when it was connected to its origin. Its existence, properties and characteristics are not distinct, apparent or visible prior to its separation. This means that these actualities are initially stored as potentialities in their original matter in a joined and undifferentiated form. Then the new creation "opens up" after being "closed" and thereby its essence and properties are actualized.

This is not limited to living species, but it also applies to the earth and the heavenly bodies. The shortness of our lives does not permit us to see the life cycle of the celestial bodies and the earth as we see it in particular beings, and that is why we cannot observe their creation and destruction. Nevertheless, they are of the same matter and what governs

material things is the same across all of them, without any object being exempted or any rule being replaced.

This continuous separation and production of particular elements from compounds in the earth and the atmosphere suggests to us that there must have been a day when everything was united and joined, without having separated yet from the earth. It also directs us to a stage when there was no separation between heaven and earth. Everything was joined together, but then God rent it asunder through an organized plan and a robust direction that made everything manifest its essence and properties in an actualized form.

This is what we can conclude by a simple observation of the visible world, including its earthly and heavenly components. Its existence is mixed with its regulation, and the entire universe is governed by a single system.

New scientific discoveries also confirm this observation, as they explain that physical bodies are made up of a limited number of common elements, each of which has a limited period of time and lifespan, although they vary in length.

The above explanation is assuming that the heavens and the earth being "closed up" means that they were not distinct from one another, and their being "opened up" means that one became distinct from the other. However, it could also be that they were "closed up" in the sense that each of them was closed within itself, such that nothing would fall from the heaven and nothing would grow from the earth. Then they were "opened up," which means the opposite of that. The meaning would be: "The heavens were closed up and did not rain, but then We opened them up with rain. The earth was also closed up without sprouting anything, but then We opened it up by making it grow things." This would also be a complete proof. This interpretation may be supported by what He says thereafter: *And We have made of water everything living* (21:30); however, it would only pertain to rain and the growth of plants out of all events, unlike the argument based on the first explanation.

Some exegetes have stated, and others have approved of it, that the heavens and the earth being "closed up" means their being indistinct from each other in pre-existence. Then their being "opened up" means coming to existence as distinct beings from each other after their non-existence. Thus, the verse would be proving the existence of the Originator—that is,

God—by drawing on the origination of the heavens and earth.

Although proving the existence of the Originator on the basis of the origination of things is correct in itself, directing such an argument to the idolaters would be pointless, because they already acknowledged His existence and ascribed the origination of things to Him. What one needs to do when debating with them is to prove that the *regulation* of the universe also belongs to Him, because they used to ascribe the regulation to their gods and worship them on this basis.

… and We have made of water everything living: Based on the context, "to make" (*jaʿl*) in this verse means "to create," and its object is "*every living thing*." It means that water plays an important role in the creation of living beings, as He says: *And Allah has created from water every living creature* (24:45). The positioning of this sign among visible signs might be an indication that this statement does not concern the angels and other similar creatures. The link between water and life has become more than clear today with modern science.

وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سُبُلًا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

(21:31) ***And We have made great mountains* (rawāsiya)** ***in the earth lest it might be convulsed* (tamīda, from mayd)** ***with them, and We have made in it wide ways (fijājan subulan, from fajj) that they may follow a right direction.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> *Rawāsī* means "mountains" (*jibāl*). The root meaning is to become fixed and established, whereby they are called *rāsiyah*. It is also used for a ship when it comes to a full rest and stop. *Mayd* means to stir and move in all directions. A *fajj* is a wide road between two mountains.

The meaning is: "We made fixed mountains in the earth so that the earth would not shake and stir them. We also made wide roads in these mountains, which they can follow as paths that take them to their destinations and homes." The verse suggests that there is a close connection between mountains and earthquakes: were it not for mountains, the earth's crust would convulse.

وَجَعَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا ۖ وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(21:32) ***And We have made the heaven a guarded canopy and (yet) they turn aside from its signs.***

Apparently what is meant by "the heaven being guarded" is that they are protected against the devils, as He says: *And We guard it against every accursed devil* (15:17). The "signs of the heaven" are various heavenly events which show that the universe is subject to a single regulation and there is a single source behind it.

وَهُوَ الَّذِى خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۖ كُلٌّ فِى فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(21:33) ***And He it is Who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon; all (orbs) travel along swiftly*** **(yasbaḥūna)** ***in their celestial spheres.***

This verse clearly states that there is a sphere (*falak*) for each of the night, the day, the sun and the moon. That is the orbit of each. The night is the conic shadow bound to the earth on the opposite side that faces the sun, and the day is the opposite of the night.

The verse is particularly concerned with the earth and the events and conditions that occur in its atmosphere; the other heavenly bodies have their own conditions. For example, the sun and other fixed luminary bodies have no day or night, and the day and night of the moon and other planets that acquire their light [from elsewhere] is different from our day and night on earth.

Yasbiḥūna is from the root *sabḥ*, which is "to pass through water by splitting it open" [that is, "to swim"]. It has been said that since "swimming" is an act of rational beings, the verb has used the conjugated form *yusbiḥūna* [with a verb ending that is used for rational beings], as it is said elsewhere: *Surely I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon—I saw them making obeisance to me* (12:4).

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣadiq said: No falsehood ever stands up to a truth without the truth defeating the falsehood. That is God says: *Nay! We cast the truth against the falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes* (21:18).[1]

1 *Al-Maḥāsin*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Yūnus, with an unconnected chain of narration *(marfūʿ)*.

(2) Imam al-Ṣadiq told Ayyūb b. al-Ḥurr: O Ayyūb! There is none who is not faced with the truth so that his heart may cleave open and show whether he adopts it or leaves it, for indeed God says in His Book: *Nay! We cast the truth against the falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It vanishes; and woe to you for what you describe* (21:18).[1]

Author's comment: These two narrations are based on a generalization of the verse.

(3) Imam al-Riḍā said: Verily the angels are infallible and safeguarded from disbelief and evil acts by God's grace. God says about them: *They do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do as they are commanded* (66:6), and He says: *And whoever is in the heavens and the earth is His; and those who are with Him are not too proud to serve Him, nor do they grow weary. They glorify (Him) by night and day; they are never languid* (21:19-20). *Those who are with Him* mean the angels.[2]

(4) Imam ʿAlī describes the angels as follows: They glorify God without getting tired. They are never overcome by the sleep of eyes, the slip of wits, the languor of bodies, and the negligence of forgetfulness.[3]

Author's comment: The above words weaken certain narrations that ascribe sleep to the angels. The next narration is one example, which also suffers from a weak chain of transmission.

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq was once asked whether the angels sleep. He said, "There is no living thing which does not sleep except for God alone." The narrator inquired, "But how come God says: *They glorify (Him) by night and day; they are never languid* (21:20)?" He said, "Their breaths [in sleep] are glorification."[4]

(6) Hishām b. al-Ḥakam says: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "What is the proof for the oneness of God?" He said: "The uniformity of

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1 *Al-Maḥāsin*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ayyūb b. al-Ḥurr.

2 *ʿUyūn-i akhbār al-Riḍā*, as a part of a narration by the Imam about Hārūt and Mārūt.

3 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

4 *Kamāl al-dīn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Dāwūd b. Farqad, on the authority of "one of our companions."

regulation and the perfection of creation, as He says: *If there had been in them any gods except Allah, they would both have certainly been in a state of disorder* (21:22)."[1]

Author's comment: This confirms what we was said above in analyzing the verse's argument.

(7) Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī says: "I asked Imam Muhammad b. ʿAlī al-Bāqir, "O son of God's Messenger! We see some children are stillborn; some are miscarried before their full development; some are born blind, deaf or dumb; some die the very moment they are born; some survive until puberty; and some live long till they become old. How can this be? What is the explanation for it?"

He said, "Verily God has more authority than His creatures to direct their affairs, for *He* is their Creator and Owner. When He prevents one from longevity, He is preventing the person from something that does not belong to him; and when He grants longevity to someone, He is giving the person something does not belong to him. Hence, He is Gracious when He gives and He is Just when He deprives. *He is not questioned concerning what He does and they shall be questioned* (21:23)."

Jābir says: I asked, "O son of God's Messenger! How is it that He is not questioned concerning what He does?"

He replied, "Because He does not do anything which is not wise and appropriate. He is the Grandiose (*al-Mutakabbir*), the Overpowering (*al-Jabbār*), the One (*al-Wāḥid*), the Subduer (*al-Qahhār*). Hence, whoever feels any constriction regarding anything that He has decreed, has fallen into disbelief; and whoever rejects any of His actions is a denier."[2]

Author's comment: This is a noble narration which gives a general rule about good and evil: good things are existential matters that trace back to God's bestowal and grace, while evil things are non-existential matters that trace back to His abstention from giving what does not belong to the servant. The Imam's statement that "God has more authority than His creatures in what they have" is explained by the fact that He is the Owner by the virtue of His very essence, while the servants own what they have only

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration.

by God's conferment. Not only that, but even when He bestows something upon s servant, He retains His ownership and authority over it. Thus, a servant's ownership is hierarchically and vertically below His ownership.

His words, "because He does not do anything which is not wise and appropriate" correspond to our first explanation given above [in the exposition of the verse]. His words, "He is the Grandiose, the Overpowering, the One, the Subduer" correspond to our second explanation above in the exposition of the verse.[1]

(8) God says: O son of Adam! It is by My will that you desire what you desire for yourself; it is through My power that you fulfil My prescribed duties for Me; and it is by My bounties that you gain strength to disobey Me. I have made you hearing, seeing and strong. *Whatever good befalls you is from Allah, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself* (4:79). That is because your good deeds are closer in attribution to Me than to yourself, while your evil deeds are closer in attribution to you than to Me. That is because I am not questioned concerning what I do, *but they shall be questioned* (21:23).[2]

(9) Concerning *This is the reminder of those with me and the reminder of those before me* (21:24) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *The reminder of those with me* means what shall happen [from now on], and *the reminder of those before me* means what has happened [before].[3]

(10) Al-Ḥusayn ibn Khālid says: ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā narrated from his forefathers up to the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī], that the Messenger of God said: "If one does not believe in my pool (*ḥawḍ*) [in the Hereafter], God will not bring him to it; and if one does not believe in my intercession (*shafāʿah*), God will not let him obtain it."

He then said, "My intercession is only for those of my nation who commit major sins. As for the good-doers, there is no way [of blame] against them."

(11) Al-Ḥusayn b. Khālid says: I then asked al-Riḍā: "O son of God's

1 The first explanation was based on God's wisdom; the second one was based on His dominion. (Trans.)

2 *Nūr al-thaqalayn*, on the authority of al-Riḍā.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Messenger! Then what does it mean when God says: *And they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of* (21:28)?" He replied: "[It means"] *they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of his religion*."[1]

(12) The Messenger of God recited the verse *And they do not intercede except for him whom He approves of* (21:28) and said: "Verily my intercession is for those of my nation who commit major sins."[2]

(13) It is narrated that ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd once went to Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Bāqir to test him through a question. He asked: "May I be your ransom! What is the meaning of His words: *Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were closed up, but We have opened them* (21:30)? What does it mean to be 'closed up' and 'opened up'?"

Abū Jaʿfar replied: "The heavens were closed up, not sending down rain; and the earth was closed up, not sprouting any plants. Thereafter God opened up the heaven with rain and opened up the earth with vegetation."

Given this answer, ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd had nothing to say, could not find any objection, and went on his way.[3]

Author's comment: A similar narration from the Imam is narrated in *Rawḍat al-kāfī* through two chains of narration.

(14) Imam ʿAlī says in *Nahj al-balāghah*: "…He then opened up its [the heaven's] doors after having been shut…"

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1 *ʿUyūn-i akhbār al-Riḍā*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim—who has authenticated it—and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Baʿth*, on the authority of Jābir.

3 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

Verses 34-47

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وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ أَفَإِيْنْ مِتَّ فَهُمْ الْخَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ
الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُمْ بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَإِذَا رَآكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
إِنْ يَتَّخِذُونَكَ إِلاَّ هُزُواً أَهَذَا الَّذِى يَذْكُرُ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَهُمْ بِذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ
﴿٣٦﴾ خُلِقَ الإِنسَانُ مِنْ عَجَلٍ سَأُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِى فَلا تَسْتَعْجِلُونِ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى
هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾ لَوْ يَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا حِينَ لا يَكُفُّونَ عَنْ
وُجُوهِهِمْ النَّارَ وَلا عَنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ وَلا هُمْ يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ بَلْ تَأْتِيهِمْ بَغْتَةً فَتَبْهَتُهُمْ
فَلا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ رَدَّهَا وَلا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾ وَلَقَدْ اسْتُهْزِئَ بِرُسُلٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ
فَحَاقَ بِالَّذِينَ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُون ﴿٤١﴾ قُلْ مَنْ يَكْلَؤُكُمْ
بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ مِنْ الرَّحْمَنِ بَلْ هُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾ أَمْ لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ
تَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ دُونِنَا لا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلا هُمْ مِنَّا يُصْحَبُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ بَلْ
مَتَّعْنَا هَؤُلاءِ وَآبَاءَهُمْ حَتَّى طَالَ عَلَيْهِمْ الْعُمُرُ أَفَلا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّا نَأْتِى الأَرْضَ
نَنقُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَا أَفَهُمْ الْغَالِبُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أُنذِرُكُمْ بِالْوَحْيِ وَلا يَسْمَعُ
الصُّمُّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا مَا يُنذَرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾ وَلَئِنْ مَسَّتْهُمْ نَفْحَةٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ يَا
وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ
شَيْئاً وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَى بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

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(21:34) *And We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you- What! Then if you die, will they live forever?*

(21:34) *Every soul shall taste of death, and We try you by evil and good by way of probation; and to Us you shall be brought back.*

(21:34) *And when those who disbelieve see you, they do not take you but for mockery: Is this he who speaks of your gods? And they are*

deniers at the remembrance of the Beneficent.

(21:34) *Man is created of haste; soon will I show you My signs; therefore, do not ask Me to hasten (them) on.*

(21:34) *And they say: When will this threat come to pass if you are truthful?*

(21:34) *Had those who disbelieve but known (of the time) when they shall not be able to ward off the fire from their faces nor from their backs, nor shall they be helped.*

(21:34) *Nay, it shall come upon them all of a sudden and cause them to become confounded, so they shall not have the power to avert it, nor shall they be respited.*

(21:34) *And certainly messengers before you were mocked; then what they mocked befell those of them who scoffed at them.*

(21:34) *Say: Who guards you by night and by day from the Beneficent? Nay, they turn aside at the remembrance of their Lord.*

(21:34) *Or have they gods besides Us who can defend them? They shall not be able to assist themselves, nor shall they be defended from Us.*

(21:34) *Nay, We have provided for them and their fathers until life was prolonged for them. Do they not then see that We come to the land and shrink its sides? Shall they then prevail?*

(21:34) *Say: I warn you only by revelation; and the deaf do not hear the call whenever they are warned.*

(21:34) *And if a blast of the chastisement of your Lord were to touch them, they would certainly say: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.*

(21:34) *And We will set up just balances on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it, and sufficient are We to take account.*

Introduction

These verses continue the discussion about prophethood by relating some of the statements of the polytheists about the Prophet. For example they said, "He will soon die, and we will be saved from him and his trouble;"; they referred to him in derision: *Is this he who speaks of your gods?* (21:36); and they mocked the Resurrection and afterlife which they were warned about: *When will this threat come to pass if you are truthful?*

(21:38). These verses answer their foolish words, warn and threaten them, and console the Prophet.

Commentary

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ أَفَإِيْنْ مِتَّ فَهُمُ الْخَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(21:34) ***And We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you. What! Then if you die, will they live forever?***

It appears from the verse that they used to comfort themselves by saying that the Prophet will die soon, and then they will be relieved of his call and their gods will be saved from his criticism. A statement similar to this has been quoted from them elsewhere: *We await the evil accidents of time for him* (52:30). The verse is God's answer to this.

We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you: In other words, it is not expected that you live forever. On the contrary: *Surely you shall die and they (too) shall surely die* [39:30]. However, your death will be of no avail to them and will not make them eternal, because everybody is going to die. Also, their short appointed lifetime will not be free of divine trial and tribulation, for there is no human being who is exempt from tribulation in life. Nor can they escape Our authority in the Hereafter, but they will return to Us and We will reckon them and requite them for what they have done.

…What! Then if you die, will they live forever? This is a rhetorical question that conveys a negation against their false impression. It does not simply say that *will they live forever?* but it says, *if you die, then will they live forever?* This implies that they viewed themselves to be eternal, and the prophet as the only impediment to that. That is why they said: *We await the evil accidents of time for him* (52:30). Thus, if you die, they will grab on eternity and live a comfortable and easy life forever. However, that is not the case. Rather, *every person shall taste of death* (21:35), and life in this world is based on trial and tribulation. Meanwhile, unending trial and eternal tribulation make no sense, but they must return to their Lord so that He may recompense them according to how He has tried them and distinguished them from one another.

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُمْ بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(21:35) ***Every person*** **(nafsin)** ***shall taste of death*** **(al-mawt)** ***and We***

try you by evil and good by way of probation; and to Us you shall be brought back.

By contemplating the usages of the word *nafs*, it can be deduced that *nafs* originally meant the same thing as it was annexed to. Thus, *nafs al-shayʾ* (lit. "the *nafs* of a thing") means "that thing" (*al-shayʾ*); *nafs al-insān* (lit. "the *nafs* of a human being") means "that human being" (*al-insān*); and *nafs al-ḥajar* (lit. "the *nafs* of a stone") means "that stone" (*al-ḥajar*). If it is used alone and not next to another word, it does not mean anything, but it only conveys emphasis [as a reflexive pronoun]. For example, it is said: Zayd "himself" came to me (*Zaydun nafsuhu* or *nafsu Zaydin*). In this sense it can be used for anything, even for God, as He says: *He has ordained mercy on Himself* (ʿalā nafsihi) (6:12); *And Allah makes you cautious of Himself* (nafsahu) (3:28); *Thou knowest what is in my mind* (fī nafsī); *and I do not know what is in Thy mind* (fī nafsika) (5:116).

Later on, this term started being used widely for individual human beings—a being that is comprised of spirit and body. Thus it acquired its own independent meaning even without annexation. He says: *He it is Who created you from a single being* (nafs)*, and of the same (kind) did He make his mate* (7:189), which means "from a single human being." He [also] says: *Whoever slays a soul* (nafsan)*, unless it be [punishment] for murder or mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all people; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all people* (5:32); that is, "whoever slays a human being" and "whoever keeps a human being alive." Both meanings [that is, *nafs* as a reflexive pronoun for emphasis, and *nafs* as an individual human being] are used in this verse: *Every soul* (nafs) *shall come, pleading for itself* (nafsihā) (16:111). The first *nafs* means the second sense of *nafs* and the second one means the original meaning.

It was later used for the human spirit in particular because it is the basis of one's life, knowledge and strength. An example of this is His words: *Give up your souls* (anfusakum); *today shall you be recompensed with an ignominious chastisement* (6:93).

These two usages—the second and third meanings [that is, "individual human being" and "human spirit"]—do not apply to non-humans, such as plants or other animals, except as a specific terms in particular disciplines [like Islamic philosophy]. In ordinary language, one does not use *nafs* to refer to an entire plant or animal, or to a part of it that runs and regulates its body. True, blood may be called *nafs* because life depends on it, as it is

called *al-nafs al-sāʾilah* (circulatory blood).

Similarly, the second and third senses of *nafs* are not lexically used for the angels or the jinn, even though they are believed to be living creatures. The Qurʾan has not used *nafs* to refer to them either, even though its verses say that the jinn, like human beings, have duties, die, and are resurrected. He says: *And I have not created the jinn and men except that they should serve Me* (51:56); *Among nations of the jinn and men that have already passed away before them* (46:18); *And on the day when He shall gather them all together: O assembly of jinn! You took away a great part of mankind* (6:128). This is what can be said about the lexical meaning of *nafs*.

As for *mawt* (death), it means "loss of life and its properties like feeling and volition by a being that has the capacity to live and have these properties." He says [about humankind]: "*You were dead and He gave you life*" (2:28), and about the idols He says: *Dead (are they), not living* (16:21).

In philosophical discussions death is often defined as "the departure of the soul from the body by the disconnection of its regulatory." It is also defined as "a transition from one abode to another," as per a Prophetic narration. However, these are meanings that are obtained from either reason (*ʿaql*) or transmission (*naql*), but not the common usages of the term. Human beings—which consist of spirit and body—are subject to death only on the basis of their *body*, because it is the body that possesses life at some point and then loses it. As for the spirit, there is nothing in His saying that it can die. Similarly, there is nothing in His words saying that *mawt* can apply to angels. It is true that He says: *Everything is perishable* (hālik, from halāk) *but He* (28:88), and: *And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are in the earth shall swoon* (fa ṣaʿiqa, from ṣaʿq) (39:68), but it will be said later on, God willing, that *halāk* and *saʿq* are different from *mawt*, even though they are sometimes concomitant.

Based on the above the following points should be clear:

(1) In *Every nafs shall taste of death*, *nafs* means "human person" (*insān*), which is the second of the three usages of the term. It does not mean the human spirit here [that is, the third meaning] because death has never been attributed to the spirit in God's Book so that it may be construed as such.

(2) The verse only applies to humankind, not to the angels, the jinn or other animals—although some of these creatures also die, such as the jinn

and the animals. A contextual evidence (*qarīnah*) that the verse applies exclusively to humankind is what He said in the previous verse: *And We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you* (21:34), as well as what He says later in this verse: *and We try you by evil and good by way of probation* (21:35). We shall discuss this below.

A group of exegetes have interpreted *nafs* in this verse as *rūḥ* (soul, spirit), but the reader should now know that the contrary is true. Many of them have insisted that the verse applies to all living creatures, including people, angels, jinn, other animals—and even plants, assuming that they are truly living. We just explained the problem with this view.

Imam al-Rāzī in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* has a very strange explanation asserting the universality of the verse. After saying that the universal expression of the verse applies to anything with a *nafs*, he says that some exceptions have been made to this:

> God also has a *nafs*, as Jesus says to Him: *Thou knowest what is in myself* (nafsī), *and I do not know what is in Thyself* (nafsika) (5:116) while it is impossible for Him to die. The same applies to inanimate objects: they have *nafs* but they do not die. A universal that has been excepted and particularized remains a proof and applicable with regards to anything that has not been made an exception to it. This refutes what philosophers say about the immortality of the human spirits, immaterial intellects and celestial souls.

There are a few problems with this view:

(1) The sense of *nafs* that can be applied to God or to anything else is the first of the three usages cited above, which is the one that is meaningful only with an annexation. This is how it is used in the verse quoted as an example [5:116]. However, in the current verse of discussion, *nafs* is used without being annexed to anything, therefore the first meaning is definitely not applicable here. Hence, the intended meaning must be one of the other two, and you would agree that the third meaning is also not intended here,[1] which leaves us with the second one.

(2) His claim that death does not apply to inanimate objects contradicts His words: *You were dead* (amwātan) *and He gave you life* (2:28), *Dead* (amwātun) *(are they), not living* (16:21), and other similar verses.

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1 This is because the Qur'an never attributes death to the spirit, as discussed above. (Trans.)

(3) His claim that "This refutes what philosophers say about the immortality of the human spirits, immaterial intellects and celestial souls" is wrong because these are rational matters that should be established by rational demonstrative proof (*burhān*), and demonstration is a decisive argument that proves something with certainty. If the arguments set forth by the philosophers in support of their claim are entirely or partially demonstrative, then the verses cannot maintain their apparent meaning. This is because the apparent meaning of a text is a speculative (*ẓanniyyah*) proof. How is it conceivable that an argument may produce certain knowledge while the opposite is also speculated? And if their arguments are not demonstrations, then their claims are not proven and there would be no need for speculative proof to counter them.

Every person shall taste of death (21:35) is a confirmation and reiteration of the idea mentioned above: *And We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you* (21:34). It is also a prelude and introduction to what is said thereafter: *And We try you by evil and good by way of probation* (21:35). It means: We will test you by what you dislike—such as illness and poverty—and by what you like—such as health and wealth—as means of trial. It is as if to say: We give every one of you a limited and appointed lifespan, and We test you throughout it by bad and good trials. Then, you will be returned to your Lord and He will judge either in your favor or against you.

This is also an indirect explanation for why death is inevitable for every soul (*nafs*). It is because the life of every soul is a period of test and trial, and a trial is obviously an introductory and preparatory matter. Something introductory cannot continue without any end. Rather, there must inevitably be something else beyond every introduction, for which the introduction is set up. Likewise, every trial must be followed by a stage at which the result is determined. This is why every living soul (*nafs*) must inevitably die and then return to God for decisive judgment.

وَإِذَا رَآكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ يَتَّخِذُونَكَ إِلاَّ هُزُواً أَهَذَا الَّذِي يَذْكُرُ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَهُمْ بِذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(21:36) ***And when those who disbelieve see you, they do not (in) take you but for mockery: Is this he who speaks of your gods? And they are deniers at the remembrance of the Beneficent.***

The Arabic particle *in* is a negative particle ("not" in "*they do not*"). It means that their dealing with him is restricted to mocking and deriding him.

… Is this he who speaks of your gods? This is what they "said" although the verse does not explicitly say it. The implied meaning is: "… they do not take you but for mockery *and they say (or saying)*: Is this he who speaks…" [where the italicized part is omitted from the verse].

This part of the verse describes their derision and mockery: the way they referred to the Prophet was derogatory. *He who speaks of your gods* means that he speaks "ill" of your gods, but they did not mention "ill" explicitly as a sign of courtesy to their gods. This is comparable to: *They said: We heard a youth called Abraham speak of them* (21:60).

… And they are deniers at the remembrance of the Beneficent: This statement is a qualifier that describes how they mocked the Prophet, or a qualifier for the implied verb "say" [in "and they say: Is this he…"]. The latter is more likely as it more readily comes to the mind. The effective meaning is: They are offended by you for the sake of their gods because you say that their gods do not benefit or harm them—which is the truth—so they confront you with nothing but scorn and insults. Yet, they are not offended that the remembrance of God is denied, while they themselves are the deniers.

The "remembrance (*dhikr*) of the Beneficent" means the remembrance of God as the One Who effuses every mercy and bestows every blessing. Being mindful of God as such necessarily entails that He is the Lord Who has to be worshiped. The "remembrance of the Beneficent" has also been interpreted as the Qur'an.

The meaning is: When those who disbelieve—that is, the polytheists—see you, they take you and deal with you with nothing but mockery and derision, saying to each other, "Is this he who speaks ill of your gods?" Thus they feel indignant for the sake of their gods because you speak negatively of them. At the same time they deny the remembrance of the Beneficent, yet they do not consider it a sin and do not feel indignant about it.

خُلِقَ الإِنسَانُ مِنْ عَجَلٍ سَأُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِي فَلا تَسْتَعْجِلُونِ ﴿٣٧﴾

(21:37) ***Man is created of haste; soon will I show you My signs; therefore, do not ask Me to hasten (them) on.***

In addition to their disbelief in the prophetic call, the polytheists used to mock the Prophet whenever they saw him, which was further disbelief and insolence. If one mocks something, it shows that they view it as something frivolous and not in earnest; they respond to frivolity with like frivolity [that is, mockery]. However, mockery [of His Prophet and Book] is no joke to God, but it is something very serious. Therefore, when they denied His message and then mocked it on top of that, they effectively exposed themselves to His punishment twice. This is equivalent to pressing for the hastening of punishment. They were not convinced by the signs that were shown to them at the time of ease, but instead they asked for signs that would recompense them for their deeds. This verse shows that He counts their mockery after their disbelief to be a request for the hastening of signs—that is, signs that bear punishment—and informs them that He will soon show these signs to them.

Man is created of haste: This is a way of expressing humankind's extreme haste, as if they were created of haste and not known for anything else. It is similar to expressions such as: "so-and-so is all good"; "he is all evil"; "he is created of goodness"; or "he is created of evil." This statement is more expressive than saying, "how hasty he is" or "his haste is so great." It is an exclamatory phrase that shows disdain for their deeds. It implies that He does not hasten their punishment because they cannot escape from Him.

… soon will I show you My signs; therefore, do not ask Me to hasten (them) on: God's "showing of His signs" here means punishing them with Hellfire, based on what comes below: *Had those who disbelieved but known…* (21:39).

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(21:38) ***And they say: When will this threat come to pass if you are* (kuntum)** ***truthful?***

The speakers of these words are those who disbelieve, and their audience is the Prophet and the believers. They should have normally said, "if you are truthful" in the singular form (*kunta*), but they used the plural "you" (*kuntum*).[1] They said so in order to bundle two things together and aim at two goals with a single shot: (1) to challenge the Prophet by asking

1 Arabic has both a singular "you" and a plural "you," unlike English. (Trans.)

him something that he would not be able to do; and (2) to lead the believers astray and entice them against the Prophet. Their requested "threat" was alluded to in the last verse, and it is explained by the next verse.

لَوْ يَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا حِينَ لا يَكُفُّونَ عَنْ وُجُوهِهِمْ النَّارَ وَلا عَنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ وَلا هُمْ يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

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(21:39) ***Had*** **(law)** ***those who disbelieve but known (of the time) when they shall not be able to ward off the fire from their faces nor from their backs, nor shall they be helped.***

The Arabic particle *law* (lit. "if") shows wish and desire (*tamannī*).[1] It is wished that they knew "when they shall not…," as the exegetes have said. *They shall not be able to ward off the fire from their faces nor from their backs*: They will not be able to stop it when it takes them from the front and from behind. This is an allusion to being surrounded by the fire.

… nor (wa) shall they be helped: This sentence presents an alternative for the previous part of the verse. That is why the two parts are joined by the conjunction *wāw* (lit. "and, but"). The meaning is: They cannot stop the fire—neither independently, nor with help from anyone else.

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The verse is an answer to their question about the appointed time [in 21:38]. It means: I wish those who disbelieve knew the time when they would not be able to keep the fire from their faces and from their backs, either independently or by help from others.

بَلْ تَأْتِيهِمْ بَغْتَةً فَتَبْهَتُهُمْ فَلا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ رَدَّهَا وَلا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(21:40) ***Nay, it shall come upon them all of a sudden and cause them to become confounded, so they shall not have the power to avert it, nor shall they be respited.***

Some exegetes have suggested that the pronoun "it"—in *it shall come upon them*—refers to "the Hour" [that is, the Resurrection]. However, the context suggests that it should refer to "Hellfire."[2] The sentence builds on what He said in the previous verse: *They shall not be able to ward off…* (21:39). Some other explanations that do not fit the context are:

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1 The implied meaning is: Only if they knew… (Trans.)

2 "The Hour" is implied by the word "when" in verses 21:38 and 21:39. "The fire" is explicitly mentioned in verse 21:39. (Trans.)

The verse is based on an implied omitted statement. The meaning is: The signs do not come to them according to their suggestion; nay, but they *shall come upon them all of a sudden…*

It builds on *Had those who disbelieve but known…* (21:39). The meaning is: they do not know this; nay, but it *shall come upon them all of a sudden…*

"Coming upon them all of a sudden" means that they will be surprised by the fire because they will not know where it is coming from and how it is surrounding them. That is the implication of how God has described the fire elsewhere: *It is the fire kindled by Allah, Which rises above the hearts* (104:6-7); *The fire of which men and stones are the fuel* (2:24); *Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of Hell* (21:98).

This kind of fire takes hold of a person's inside and outside equally. It is not like fire in this world, which has to move from one place to another, taking the outside before the inside and the external before the internal. The fire of Hell is not gradual in its work and does not allow them to distance themselves from it. It leaves no way for them to dodge it, turn aside from it, create a barrier against it, or take shelter in a safe place. Rather, it is with them as their souls are with them: it is not limited to a specific direction, and it gives them no respite because there is no distance between it and them. Hence, its "coming upon them" only results in their astonishment and confusion.

Thus the verse means (and God knows best): They cannot keep the fire away from their faces or backs. It strikes them from where they do not know, from where they least expect. It is a surprise for them and they cannot hold it back or delay its arrival.

وَلَقَدِ اسْتُهْزِئَ بِرُسُلٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ فَحَاقَ بِالَّذِينَ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(21:41) ***And certainly messengers before you were mocked*** **(istuhziʾa, from huzʾ)*****; then what they mocked befell*** **(fa-ḥāqa, from ḥayq)** ***those of them who scoffed*** **(sakhirū, from sukhriyyah)** ***at them.***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> The difference between *sukhriyyah* and *huzʾ* is that *huzʾ* means "to degrade someone through speech" while *sukhriyyah* means "to humiliate someone." *Taskhīr* means *tadhlīl* (to humiliate, to subjugate).

Hayq means "to befall." "*What they mocked*" refers to "punishment." The verse comforts the Prophet, and warns and threatens the disbelievers.

قُلْ مَنْ يَكْلَؤُكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ مِنَ الرَّحْمَنِ بَلْ هُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّهِمْ مُعْرِضُونَ﴿٤٢﴾

(21:42) ***Say: Who guards you*** **(yuaklaʾukum, from kilāʾah)** ***by night and by day from the Beneficent? Nay, they turn aside at the remembrance of their Lord.***

Kilāʾah means protection. The meaning is: ask them "Who is it that would protect them from the Beneficent if He wishes to punish them?"

… Nay, they turn aside at the remembrance of their Lord: This transition shows that admonition and warning is ineffective on them. "The remembrance (*dhikr*) of their Lord" refers to "the Qur'an." They do not pay any attention to it and do not want to listen attentively when you recite it to them. *Dhikr* has also been interpreted as "any admonition and proof."

أَمْ لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ تَمْنَعُهُمْ مِنْ دُونِنَا لا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَلا هُمْ مِنَّا يُصْحَبُونَ﴿٤٣﴾

(21:43) ***Or*** **(am)** ***have they gods besides Us who can defend them*** **(tamnaʿuhum min dūninā)*****? They shall not be able to assist themselves, nor shall they be defended from Us.***

The Arabic particle *am* (lit. "or") is disconnected from what was before it.[1] The question is a rhetorical one that implies a negation. The words *tamnaʿuhum* and *min dūninā* are descriptions of "gods." The meaning is: on the contrary, ask them if they have gods apart from us to protect them from Us.[2]

… They shall not be able to assist themselves, nor shall they be defended from Us: This justifies the negation implied by the rhetorical question above. That is why it is not joined with a conjunction to the previous sentence. The implied meaning is: "They do not have any gods

1 In other words, the term "or" does not introduce a choice or possibility *parallel* to the previous verse, but it marks a new independent statement *in addition* to the above. (Trans.)

2 According to the author's interpretation, *min dūninā* means "besides Us," and therefore "from Us" is implied by the verse but not explicitly mentioned in the verse. Another possible translation is that *min dūninā* means "from Us" and it is implied that the gods are "other than God." (Trans.)

like that because their gods cannot help themselves—that is, one helping another—nor are they protected or guarded from Us. Therefore how can such gods help or protect their servants and worshipers—that is, the polytheists?" Some have suggested that the third person plural pronouns in the verse refer to the polytheists, but that does not match the context.

بَلْ مَتَّعْنَا هَؤُلاءِ وَآبَاءَهُمْ حَتَّى طَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْعُمُرُ أَفَلا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّا نَأْتِي الأَرْضَ نَنقُصُهَا مِنْ أَطْرَافِهَا أَفَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(21:44) ***Nay, We have provided for them and their fathers until life was prolonged for them. Do they not then see that We come to the land and shrink its sides? Shall they then prevail?***

This is another transition from the purport of the previous verse, just as "*Nay, they turn aside at the remembrance of their Lord*" (21:43) was a transition from its preceding part of the verse. The meanings, as you can see, are similar.

… until life was prolonged for them: This describes the end result of their continued provision and enjoyment mentioned in the first part of the verse. The implied meaning is: Nay, We have provided for these polytheists and their fathers such provision and endowment that continued until their lives were prolonged, they were deluded by that, forgot the remembrance of God, and turned away from serving Him. That is how the Quraysh society was: After their forefather Ishmael, they lived in the Holy Precinct (*ḥaram*) [of Mecca] safe, where they were provided for with various blessings which were brought to them.[1] This continued until they took control of Mecca, expelled [the tribe of] Jurhum, forgot the religion of their forefather Abraham which they were following, and instead started worshiping idols.

… Do they not then see that We come to the land and shrink its sides? Shall they then prevail? The meaning which fits the context best is that "shrinking the sides of the land" refers to the extinction of certain nations that live on it. Indeed, *every nation has a term; when their term comes, they shall not then remain behind for an hour, nor can they go before (their time)* [10:49; 7:34]. This complies with our interpretation above that "prolonging people's life" in this verse means extending the lifespan of their society.

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1 See verse 28:57. (Trans.)

The meaning is: Do they not see that nation after nation is taken off the earth by way of extinction by God's command? What would stop Him from causing them to perish likewise? Can they hold out if God wills harm, doom or extinction for them?

The reader should refer to a similar verse in Sūrah al-Raʿd [13:41] for some other points that also apply to here.

Note that these verses involve some shifts of address for rhetorical effect (*iltifāt*) that we have skipped because they are obvious.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أُنذِرُكُمْ بِالْوَحْيِ وَلا يَسْمَعُ الصُّمُّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا مَا يُنذَرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(21:45) ***Say: I warn you only by revelation; and the deaf do not hear the call whenever they are warned.***

That is: What I am warning you with is divine revelation in which there is no doubt. It does not have its desired effect on you—that is, your guidance—because of some deafness in you that makes you deaf to hearing warnings. The deficiency is yours, not its.

وَلَئِنْ مَسَّتْهُمْ نَفْحَةٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(21:46) ***And if a blast*** **(nafḥah)** ***of the chastisement of your Lord were to touch them, they would certainly say: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust.***

Nafḥah means "an incident of punishment." It means that the warning with the verses of the reminder [that is, the Qur'an] will not avail them. Instead, what these people need is a blast of punishment so that they are forced to believe and acknowledge their wrongdoing.

وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئاً وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَى بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(21:47) ***And We will set up just*** **(al-qisṭ)** ***balances on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it, and sufficient are We to take account.***

Qist means "justice, fairness." It is added to *al-mawāzīn* (scales, balances) as an interpretation. It could also be its adjective assuming an implied omission: balances *possessed of* justice (*dhawāt al-qisṭ*). We already discussed the scales that are set up on the Day of Resurrection in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf [under verse 7:8].

… and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it, and sufficient are We to take account: "*Though there be*" refers to "the action that is weighed," as implied by the mention of "balances." That is: "Even if the mass of the weighted deeds is equivalent to that of a mustard seed, We will bring it, *and sufficient are We to take account*." The weight of a mustard seed is used as a symbol of smallness and insignificance in examples and analogies.

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Examining Narrations

(1) When Gabriel informed the Prophet about his death, the Prophet replied, "My Lord, then who will there be for my nation?" Then this verse was revealed: *And We did not ordain eternal life for any mortal before you…* (21:34).[1]

Author's comment: These verses involve a context of censure which does not fit what is mentioned in this narration. Furthermore, this question does not match the Prophet's status. Besides, this is one of the oldest Meccan chapters, while the news of his death was given to the Prophet at the end his life.

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(2) The Prophet was once passing by Abū Sufyān and Abū Jahl while they were talking. When Abū Jahl saw him, he laughed and said to Abū Sufyan, "This is Banū ʿAbd Manāf's prophet!" Abū Sufyan became angry and said, "What do you see wrong with Banū ʿAbd Manāf having a prophet?" When the Prophet heard this he went to them, rebuked and threatened Abū Jahl, and told him: "I can see that you will not stop [your defiance] until you are struck by what struck your uncle." Then he said to Abū Sufyan, "As for you, you only said what you said out of tribal fanaticism (*ḥamiyyah*)." Thereafter, this verse was revealed: *And when those who disbelieve see you, they do not take you but for mockery* (21:36).[2]

Author's comment: Like the previous one, this story does not fully fit the verse.

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(3) Once the Commander of the Faithful [ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib] fell ill

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of Ibn Jurayj.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of al-Suddī.

and his brothers went to visit him. They asked, "How do you see yourself, O Commander of the Faithful?" He said, "In evil (*sharr*)." They said, "This is not the speech of someone like you!" He replied, "Verily God says: *And We try you by evil and good by way of probation* (21:35). Good is health and wealth, and evil is sickness and poverty."[1]

(4) Concerning the verse, *Do they not then see that We come to the land and shrink its sides?* (21:44) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says: This has been interpreted as the death of scholars. It is also narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq that "the shrinking of the land is through the passing of its scholar."

Author's comment: The meaning of this hadith was discussed above in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Raᶜd [under verse 13:41].

(5) Imam ᶜAlī said: As for His words *And We will set up just balances on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least* (21:47), it refers to the scale of justice by which the creatures are held accountable on the Day of Resurrection. God will take from some people [and give] to others by means of the scales.[2]

(6) Hishām says: I asked Abū ᶜAbd-Allāh [Imam al-Ṣādiq] about God's words: *And We will set up just balances on the Day of Resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least* (21:47). He replied, "They are the prophets and their successors."[3]

Author's comment: This is also narrated in *al-Kāfī* from the Imam via an unconnected chain of narration (*marfūᶜ*). Other narrations to the same effect were cited in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Aᶜrāf [under verse 7:8]. We discussed them there to the extent possible.

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, part of a hadith where a man asks the Imam about some verses which were confusing to him.

3 *Maᶜānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration.

Verses 48-77

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ الْفُرْقَانَ وَضِيَاءً وَذِكْراً لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ
رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَيْبِ وَهُمْ مِنَ السَّاعَةِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾ وَهَذَا ذِكْرٌ مُبَارَكٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ أَفَأَنْتُمْ لَهُ
مُنكِرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُشْدَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَالِمِينَ ﴿٥١﴾ إِذْ قَالَ لأَبِيهِ
وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَذِهِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا لَهَا عَابِدِينَ
﴿٥٣﴾ قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ فِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾ قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا بِالْحَقِّ أَمْ
أَنْتَ مِنَ اللاَّعِبِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾ قَالَ بَل رَبُّكُمْ رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ الَّذِي فَطَرَهُنَّ وَأَنَا
عَلَى ذَلِكُمْ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَتَاللَّهِ لأَكِيدَنَّ أَصْنَامَكُمْ بَعْدَ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا
مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾ فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُذَاذاً إِلاَّ كَبِيراً لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾ قَالُوا مَنْ فَعَلَ
هَذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾ قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يَذْكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾
قَالُوا فَأْتُوا بِهِ عَلَى أَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾ قَالُوا أَأَنْتَ فَعَلْتَ هَذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا
يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾ قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ هَذَا فَاسْأَلُوهُمْ إِنْ كَانُوا يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ فَرَجَعُوا
إِلَى أَنفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ ثُمَّ نُكِسُوا عَلَى رُءُوسِهِمْ لَقَدْ
عَلِمْتَ مَا هَؤُلاءِ يَنطِقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ قَالَ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لا يَنفَعُكُمْ شَيْئاً
وَلا يَضُرُّكُمْ ﴿٦٦﴾ أُفٍّ لَكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَفَلا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾ قَالُوا
حَرِّقُوهُ وَانصُرُوا آلِهَتَكُمْ إِنْ كُنتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾ قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْداً وَسَلاماً عَلَى
إِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴿٦٩﴾ وَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْداً فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الأَخْسَرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَلُوطاً إِلَى الأَرْضِ
الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً وَكُلاًّ جَعَلْنَا
صَالِحِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَةِ
الصَّلاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾ وَلُوطاً آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْماً وَعِلْماً وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ

مِنْ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ تَعْمَلُ الْخَبَائِثَ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَاسِقِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾ وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُ
فِي رَحْمَتِنَا إِنَّهُ مِنْ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾ وَنُوحاً إِذْ نَادَى مِنْ قَبْلُ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَنَجَّيْنَاهُ
وَأَهْلَهُ مِنْ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٦﴾ وَنَصَرْنَاهُ مِنْ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا
قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(21:48) *And certainly We gave to Moses and Aaron the Criterion and a light and a reminder for those who would guard (against evil).*

(21:49) *(For) those who fear their Lord in secret and they are fearful of the Hour.*

(21:50) *And this is a blessed reminder which We have revealed; will you then deny it?*

(21:51) *And certainly We gave to Abraham his rectitude before, and We knew him fully well.*

(21:52) *When he said to his father and his people: What are these images to whose worship you cleave?*

(21:53) *They said: We found our fathers worshiping them.*

(21:54) *He said: Certainly you have been, (both) you and your fathers, in manifest error.*

(21:55) *They said: Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of the triflers?*

(21:56) *He said: Nay! your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who brought them into existence, and I am of those who bear witness to this:*

(21:57) *And, by Allah! I will certainly plot against your idols after you go away, turning back.*

(21:58) *So he broke them into pieces, except their chief, that haply they may return to it.*

(21:59) *They said: Who has done this to our gods? Most surely he is one of the unjust.*

(21:60) *They said: We heard a youth called Abraham speak of them.*

(21:61) *Said they: Then bring him before the eyes of the people; perhaps they may bear witness.*

(21:62) *They said: Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?*

(21:63) *He said: Nay, it was this chief of them that did it. Ask them, if they can speak.*

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(21:64) *So they turned to themselves and said: Surely you yourselves are the unjust;*
(21:65) *Then they were made to hang down their heads: Certainly you know that they do not speak.*
(21:66) *He said: What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you?*
(21:67) *Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah; what! do you not then understand?*
(21:68) *They said: Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything).*
(21:69) *We said: O fire! Be coolness and peace to Abraham;*
(21:70) *And they desired a war on him, but We made them the greatest losers.*
(21:71) *And We delivered him as well as Lot (removing them) to the land which We had blessed for all people.*
(21:72) *And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, as an additional gift, and We made (them) all good.*
(21:73) *And We made them Imams who guided (people) by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of alms, and Us (alone) did they serve;*
(21:74) *And (as for) Lot, We gave him wisdom and knowledge, and We delivered him from the town which wrought abominations; surely they were an evil people, transgressors;*
(21:75) *And We took him into Our mercy; surely he was of the good.*
(21:76) *And Noah, when he cried aforetime, so We answered him, and delivered him and his followers from the great calamity.*
(21:77) *And We helped him against the people who rejected Our communications; surely they were an evil people, so We drowned them all.*

Introduction

After a full discussion of prophethood on the basis of resurrection, God continues in these verses by referring to the stories of a number of noble prophets whom He sent to the people. He supported them with wisdom and religious law (shariah), and delivered from the hands of the oppressors in their nations. These accounts continue the previous thread of proving the legislation of religion, warning and threatening the

polytheists, and giving good news to the believers.

There are seventeen prophets in total who are mentioned in this chapter: Moses, Aaron, Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Ishmael, Enoch (Idrīs), Ezekiel (Dhū al-Kifl), Jonah, Zechariah, John and Jesus. Seven of them are mentioned in the current set of verses. They start with Moses and Aaron, followed by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Lot who were their predecessors. They are then followed by Noah who was their predecessor.

Commentary

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ الْفُرْقَانَ وَضِيَاءً وَذِكْراً لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَيْبِ وَهُمْ مِنَ السَّاعَةِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(21:48-49) ***And certainly We gave to Moses and Aaron the Criterion* (al-furqān)** ***and a light* (ḍiyāʾan)** ***and a reminder* (dhikran)** ***for those who would guard (against evil)* (lil-muttaqīn). *(For) those who fear their Lord in secret and they are fearful of the Hour.***

In a sense this is a return to what was mentioned briefly before: *And We did not send before you any but men to whom We sent revelation* (21:7). It elaborates on that by referring to what the prophets were given—that is, their teachings and codes of religious law—and what they were supported with—that is, the destruction of their enemies through equitable judgment.

The subsequent verse [21:50] shows that "the Criterion" (*al-furqān*), "the light" and "the reminder" refer to the Torah. That is what God gave to Moses and his brother Aaron who was his partner in the prophetic mission.

Furqān is an infinitive, like *farq* (lit. "to separate, to distinguish"), with the difference that *furqān* is more expressive [of the root meaning] than *farq*.[1] According to al-Rāghib, it has been said that *furqān* is not an infinitive, but it is a noun [that is, "separation, distinction"]. The Torah is called *furqān* because it separates or differentiates truth from falsehood in belief and action. The verse is similar to: *And when We gave Moses the Book and the Criterion* (al-furqān) *that you might walk aright* (2:53). It is called "light" because it illuminates their path to happiness and success in this world

1 That is, *furqān* conveys a greater degree of separation and distinction. (Trans.)

and the Hereafter. It is called a "reminder" because it contains aphorisms, admonitions and lessons through which one is reminded of God.

Why does the verse say *al-furqān* in the definite form [with the definite article *al-*]? A possible answer is that one of the names of the Torah is al-Furqān, as opposed to *ḍiyā'* (light) and *dhikr* (reminder) [which are its attributes]. Another possible answer is that the Torah is a criterion (*furqān*) for everyone, while it is a light and reminder only for the God-conscious, because others do not benefit from it. That is why "light" and "reminder" are in the indefinite form (*nakirah*) so that they can be qualified by *lil-muttaqīn* (meaning, "for those who would guard against evil"), as opposed to *al-furqān* [which is in the unconditional form and not qualified by the end of the verse].[1] The Torah is called a light and reminder elsewhere in the Qur'an: *…in which was guidance and light* (5:44), and: *So ask the followers of the reminder* (21:7).

وَهَٰذَا ذِكْرٌ مُّبَارَكٌ أَنزَلْنَاهُ أَفَأَنتُمْ لَهُ مُنكِرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(21:50) ***And this is a blessed reminder*** **(dhikrun mubārakun)** ***which We have revealed; will you then deny it?***

The demonstrative pronoun "this" refers to the Qur'an. It is called a "blessed" reminder because it comprises of abundant, constant and persistent good.[2] Believers and unbelievers alike in human society benefit from this Book. Humanity is blessed by it whether they acknowledge it or deny it, and whether they confirm its truth or reject it.

This can be shown by analyzing the welfare and development of the human population today, compared to the when the Qur'an was revealed and prior to that. Then one would realize that this has been a blessed reminder whose teachings have guided humanity even though the ignorant do not know its textual form; even though the deniers reject its truth and are ungrateful for its great bounty; and even though Muslims have facilitated their ignorance, denial and ungratefulness through their own

1 The capitalized form of "the Criterion" and "*al-Furqān*" are based on the first interpretation, where Furqān is one of the specific names of the Torah. However, if we adopt the second interpretation then they should be lower case because they would be an adjective or attribute of the Torah, just like "light" and "reminder." (Trans.)

2 Abundance, stability and persistence of good are the main elements of the root *mubārak* (blessed). (Trans.)

neglect of their Book. The Messenger said: O Lord, verily my people have treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing (25:30).

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ رُشْدَهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا بِهِ عَالِمِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

(21:51) ***And certainly*** **(laqad)** ***We gave to Abraham his rectitude*** **(rushdahu)** ***before, and We knew him fully well.***

This goes back to what preceded Moses, Aaron and the revelation of the Torah, as indicated by "before." It means that the giving of the Torah to Moses and Aaron was not an unprecedented thing that We did. On the contrary, "I swear (*laqad*) that We gave Abraham his rectitude before that."

Rushd is the opposite of *ghayy* (error) and it means "to hit the truth." Abraham's rectitude was his pure, primary and inherent (*fiṭrī*) disposition toward monotheism and other true teachings. Saying "*his* rectitude" implies a special sense of rectitude that was exclusive to him, and shows his worthiness. This is confirmed by what He says afterwards: "*And We knew Him fully well*," which is a way of saying that We knew his specific condition and maximum capacity.

The meaning is: "I swear that We certainly gave Abraham the rectitude and ability to reach the truth that he was capable and worthy of, and We knew fully well his maximum capacity and worthiness." What God gave him, as previously mentioned, was what he realized through the purity of his primary nature and the light of his vision—and that was the truth of monotheism and other true teachings. He realized them without being taught by a teacher, reminded by a reminder or prompted by a prompter.

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَذِهِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(21:52) ***When he said to his father and his people: What are these images*** **(al-tamāthīl)** ***to whose worship you cleave*** **(ʿākifūn, from ʿukūf)*?***

A *timthāl* is "an image or depiction." Its plural is *tamāthīl*. *ʿUkūf* means "to turn to something and adhere to it in glorification." That is according to al-Rāghib's definition of the two terms.

What he meant by "these images" was the idols which they had put up for worship and were offering sacrifices to. His question was about the reality of the idols so that he could get to know their significance. This was the first time he had gone into society. He had entered a religious society which worshiped images and idols. His question was in fact a combination of two questions: a question to his "father" about the idols [here],

which was before his question to his people, mentioned in Sūrah al-Anʿām [6:74ff]. The meaning of the verse is clear.

قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا لَهَا عَابِدِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(21:53) ***They said: We found our fathers worshiping them.***

This is the answer of his people to him. His question about the *reality* of the idols [the "what" question] was in reality a question about the *reason* for worshiping the idols [the "why"]. That is why they justified their act as an ethnic practice and said that it was the custom of their fathers and grandfathers to worship them.

قَالَ لَقَدْ كُنتُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ فِي ضَلالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(21:54) ***He said: Certainly you have been, (both) you and your fathers, in manifest error.***

The reason why they were in manifest error is seen in his argument against them after breaking the idols: *What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you?* (21:66)

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا بِالْحَقِّ أَمْ أَنْتَ مِنْ اللاَّعِبِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(21:55) ***They said: Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of the triflers?***

This is an expression of their surprise and suspicion. It is the nature of an undiscerning blind follower that, when confronted with an opposing view, he deems it unlikely and does not acknowledge the possibility that someone might challenge his belief. That is why they asked him: *Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of the triflers?* Based on the context, "the truth" here means "something earnest and serious." That is: Are you serious in what you are saying, or is this a joke?

قَالَ بَل رَّبُّكُمْ رَبُّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالأَرْضِ الَّذِي فَطَرَهُنَّ وَأَنَا عَلَى ذَلِكُمْ مِنْ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(21:56) ***He said: Nay! your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who brought them into existence, and I am of those who bear witness to this.***

As you can see, he told them that their Lord is the same as the Lord

of the heavens, Which is the same as the Creator of the heavens and the earth: God. This was completely contrary to their position on lordship and divinity, because they believed that they have a god or gods apart from the god or gods of the heavens and the earth, all of whom are other than God. Their view was that He is neither their god nor the god of the heavens or the earth. Rather, they believed that He is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, and the Creator of all.

Thus, his words "Nay! your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, Who brought them into existence" refute their position on divinity in all respects, and assert that there is no god but God. This equates to monotheism.

… and I am of those who bear witness to this: Here he is saying that he is committed to the implications and consequences of what he just said. His shahādah (witness, testimony) to it means that he both acknowledges it and adheres to it, because knowledge of something is different from adhering to it, for the two may diverge, as He says [about Pharaoh and his people]: And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them (27:14).

His testimony completes his answer to their question as to whether he was earnest or trifling in what he was saying. The answer is: No, on the contrary, I know it and adhere to it in practice.

This is the meaning of the verse according to the context. Commentators have given other interpretations for these verses and also for the previous and subsequent stories. We skipped them because there is no benefit in addressing them. They comply with neither the thread of the verses nor the beliefs of the idolaters.

وَتَاللَّهِ لَأَكِيدَنَّ أَصْنَامَكُمْ بَعْدَ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(21:57) ***And, by Allah! I will certainly plot against*** **(la-akīdanna, from kayd)** ***your idols after you go away.***

The word "and" adds this verse to "Nay! your Lord… (21:56), which means that this is also something that he said. It means: "He said: By *Allah*! I will certainly plot against your idols…" Kayd means "to make a secret plot of something unpleasant against someone." "After you go away" indicates that they used to leave the town or the house of the idols at certain times, perhaps for a festival or another similar custom, such that the place would remain empty.

And, by *Allah*! I will certainly plot against your idols: It can be inferred from the context of the story and the nature of this statement that he did not literally say this to his people, but this is a statement of his intention to do harm to their idols. A firm intention is often referred to as something that one "says." For example, sometimes it is said, "I will certainly do this because of what I said," meaning "because of the decision that I made."

It is unlikely that he actually said this to his people who were a nation of big, powerful, influential, ardent and fanatical idolaters. At that time there were no monotheists apart from him amongst them, as this event was at the beginning of Abraham's call. It would not be prudent for him to tell the people of his intention to harm their idols, especially explicitly stating that it was a plot by him for a day when no one will be in town or in the house of idols. This is equivalent to disclosing a secret to exactly the same people that one does not want to find out about it. At most he might have said this to some of the people from whom the statement would not spread; but as for proclaiming the secret to all of them, definitely not.

فَجَعَلَهُمْ جُذَاذاً إِلاَّ كَبِيراً لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(21:58) ***So he broke them into pieces* (judhādhan, from jadhdh)*, except their chief, that haply they may return to it.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Jadhdh* means "to break and fragment something." Broken stones of gold and fragments of gold are called *judhādh*. This is what is meant in His words: *So he broke them into pieces* (21:58).

It means that he broke all of the idols into pieces except for their chief.

… that haply they may return to it: Based on the context, this expression of hope [indicated by "haply"] is apparently meant to show what his action *resembled*. That is, his breaking of all but the chief idol was the action of someone who *wants* the people to see what had happened to their idols—being all broken into pieces—and find the chief idol unbroken among them, so that they would refer to the chief idol and accuse it of breaking the rest. It is much like someone who kills a group of people but spares one so that he may be accused of their murder.

Thus, the pronoun "it" in "to it" (*ilayhi*) refers to "their chief." This is confirmed by Abraham's subsequent words, where he says, "*their chief did it*" (21:63) in response to their question, "*Have you done this to our gods…*?" (21:62).

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The majority of exegetes believe that the pronoun in *ilayhi* [which can be translated as "to him"] refers to Abraham. The meaning would thus be: "He then broke the idols and spared their chief so that the people might refer to Abraham. Then he would argue with them, overcome them and make it evident to them that their idols are not gods." Some claim that the pronoun refers to God, which would mean: "He then broke them but spared the chief idol so that the people might return to God in worship, because they see the idols in such a state. Through the breaking of their idols they would realize that these idols are not gods as they had presumed."

It is evident that in both of these interpretations, *except their chief* would be redundant, despite the contrived and unsuccessful efforts of some exegetes to give it some position. What prevented them from referring the pronoun to the chief idol is that the expression of hope would be incorrect based on this interpretation. However, the reader now knows that this expression represents how the event would appear to one who sees it from outside, not that Abraham really had such a hope.[1]

قَالُوا مَنْ فَعَلَ هَٰذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا إِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(21:59) ***They said: Who* (man) *has done this to our gods? Most surely he is one of the unjust.***

They said this question out of remorse and also in search for the perpetrator of this injustice. This is supported by what He says next: *They said: We heard a youth called Abraham speak of them* (21:60). Some exegetes have suggested that the Arabic particle *man* (lit. "who") is a relative pronoun [as opposed to an interrogative one].[2] But based on the above points this is not correct.

… Most surely he is one of the unjust: Their judgment was that he was unjust and had to be punished for his wrongdoing. In their view, their gods had the right to be revered, so he wronged them by transgressing

1 He could not have really hoped this because it does not make sense to expect the people to really hold an idol responsible for breaking the other idols. The author's explanation is that this expression could have another interpretation which would be plausible, and that is by "resemblance" of the event. (Trans.)

2 The meaning would be: He who has done this to our gods most surely is one of the unjust. (Trans.)

this right. The people also had the right that their gods and what was sacred to them must be honored and respected. Thus, he also wronged the people by transgressing their right. Finally, he wronged himself as well by transgressing his limit and doing something that he had no right to do.

قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا فَتًى يَذْكُرُهُمْ يُقَالُ لَهُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾

(21:60) ***They said: We heard a youth called Abraham speak of them.***

Based on the context, "speak" here means "speak ill." That is: We heard a youth speak ill of the gods. Therefore, if anyone is behind this crime, it must be him, for only someone bold like him would commit a crime like this.

Ibrāhīm is *marfūᶜ* in terms of inflection, indicating that it is a predicate for an omitted subject. The implied meaning is: "He is called Abraham" (*huwa Ibrāhīm*). So says al-Zamakhsharī.

قَالُوا فَأْتُوا بِهِ عَلَىٰ أَعْيُنِ النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(21:61) ***Said they: Then bring him before the eyes of the people; perhaps they may bear witness.***

Bringing him before the eyes of the people means bringing him before a public assembly where everyone can see. The place was where he broke the idols, based on Abraham's reference to the chief idol when he says: *Nay, it was this chief of them* (21:63).

… they may bear witness: Apparently this means that they wanted the people to bear witness to his speaking ill of their gods. That would make him confess to smashing the idols. Some exegetes have suggested that they wanted the people to witness Abraham's punishment, but this is an unlikely interpretation.

قَالُوا أَأَنْتَ فَعَلْتَ هَٰذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ ﴿٦٢﴾

(21:62) ***They said: Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?***

This question is meant to determine the doer of the act; otherwise the very occurrence of the act was given and certain to them. The expression "our gods" implies that they did not consider him to be an idol worshiper.

قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ هَٰذَا فَاسْأَلُوهُمْ إِنْ كَانُوا يَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(21:63) ***Nay, it was this chief of them that did it. Ask them, if they can***

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speak.

His claim here—that *it was this chief of them that did it*—was an argument that was meant to trap the opponent into a concession. It implicitly refutes the divinity of their idols, which he explicitly states later: *What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you?…* (21:66). It was not meant literally for sure, and such statements are common in debates and arguments.

The meaning is: He said, "What we see—that they are all broken into pieces while their chief is standing untouched—testifies that their chief has done it." This sets the ground for him to say: *Ask them...* (21:63).

… Ask them, if they can speak: He ordered the people to ask the idols about the fact of the matter and who did this to them, so that they [the idols] would inform their worshipers—if they could speak. In other words, *if they can speak* is a condition, where its apodosis is omitted but implied by: *Ask them*.[1]

In summary, the verse can have its literal meaning. There is no need for any complication or contrivance of assuming some omission in the verse, or assuming that some parts of the verse have been shifted from their original position, which should have otherwise come sooner or later. The first part of the verse which ascribes the act to their chief is meant to compel the opponent to concede. It also sets the grounds for the subsequent part, where he tells them to ask the idols if they can speak. This in turn is meant to lead them to admit that their gods cannot speak.

Some exegetes have said that *if they can speak* qualifies the first part of the verse: *Nay, it was this chief of them that did it*. The implied meaning would be: "If they could speak, then their chief did it, but since their speech is impossible, so too is his action." This means that *therefore ask them* is a parenthetical remark.

Some have said: The subject of "*did it*" is omitted, and the meaning is: "Nay, whoever did it did it." Then what follows is another independent sentence: "Here is their chief, so ask them…."

Others have made other suggestions, but they are all explanations which involve contrivances and complications that are far from God's Book.

فَرَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

1 The implied meaning is: *They will tell you* if they can speak. (Trans.)

(21:64) ***So they turned to themselves and said: Surely you yourselves are the unjust;***

This is consequential to *ask them, if they can speak*. The proof and argument was completed against them when they heard that from him, for they could see that the idols were inanimate objects without any sense or ability to speak. Therefore they all judged *themselves* to be unjust, not Abraham. "Returning to oneself" is a metaphor for self-examination and realization.

… and said: Surely you yourselves are the unjust: Namely, all the people said to themselves, "Surely you yourself are the unjust ones because you worship an inanimate object which does not speak."

Some exegetes have interpreted the verse to mean that they then turned to each other and said to one to another: "Surely you yourselves are the unjust." However, the reader would agree that this does not fit the context, which is to prove the injustice of each and every one of them. If the verse were about what they said to one another, then they should have said: "Surely *we* are the unjust," as seen in other similar verses such as: *Then some of them advanced against others, blaming each other. Said they: O woe to us! Surely we were inordinate* (68:30-31), and: *Then would you begin to lament: Surely we are burdened with debt: Nay! We are deprived* (56:65-67).

ثُمَّ نُكِسُوا عَلَىٰ رُءُوسِهِمْ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا هَٰؤُلَاءِ يَنْطِقُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(21:65) ***Then they were turned*** **(nukisū, from naks)** ***on their heads: Certainly you know that they do not speak.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Naks* means turning something upside down. For instance, when a baby is born with its foot before its head, it is said *nakasa al-walad*. He says: *Then they were turned on their heads* (21:65).

Hence, the expression *they were turned on their heads* is a metaphor or metonymy for them replacing falsehood with the truth that had become clear to them, and instead the replacing the truth with falsehood. It is as if the truth had risen above falsehood in their hearts, but then they were turned on their heads as they raised up falsehood. They raised the false idea that "Abraham is unjust" above the truth that "they themselves are unjust." As a result they disputed with Abraham by saying: *Certainly you know that they do not speak*.

… Certainly you know that they do not speak: That is: You are

defending yourself by accusing the chief idol of breaking the others into pieces, and by ordering us to make the gods speak. However, you know that they cannot speak, which shows that you are the unjust perpetrator. Thus, this statement implies that they judged Abraham to be guilty.

قَالَ أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ ﴿٦٦﴾ أُفٍّ لَكُمْ وَلِمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۖ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(21:66-67) ***He said: What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you? Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah; what! do you not then understand?***

When Abraham heard them say, *they do not speak* (21:65), he did not waste any time trying to defend himself, for he was not intending to do so from the beginning. On the contrary, he drew upon their own words and argued based on their necessary implications to complete the proof against them that their idols are not worthy of being worshiped; that is, they are not gods.

He said: What! Do you then serve besides Allah what brings you not any benefit at all, nor does it harm you? The letter *fā*ʾ (lit. "then") at the beginning of this verse shows that what follows is a consequence of the previous verse. Therefore, these verses imply the following line of argument: The implication of their inability to speak is that they do not know anything and cannot do anything. Because of that, it follows that they cannot be of any benefit or harm to you. Hence, serving and worshiping them would be futile, because service and worship (*ʿibādah*) is based on either hope of some good or fear of some evil. They have none of that; therefore, they are not gods.

… Fie on you and on what you serve besides Allah: This is an expression of disgust and disassociation from them and their gods after refuting their divinity. It is similar to his bearing witness to God's Oneness after proving and asserting it above: *and I am of those who bear witness to this* (21:56).

… do you not then understand? This is an expression of reproach.

قَالُوا حَرِّقُوهُ وَانْصُرُوا آلِهَتَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(21:68) ***They said: Burn him and help your gods, if you are going to do (anything).***

Since Abraham refuted their view of the idols being gods, its implication is that breaking them is not a crime or injustice. Despite this, what he said above alluded to the chief idol as being responsible for this. He and told them to ask their [smashed] gods about this—not to defend himself against the charge of crime, but only as a prelude to refute the divinity of their gods. Therefore, in a sense he remained silent against the charge and did not deny it, which is why they judged that he was guilty and his penalty was to be burned in fire. That is why they said: *Burn him and help your gods*. It means: Help your gods by honoring their status and punishing whoever insults them.

… If you are going to do (anything): They said this to entice and arouse the people's emotions.

قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(21:69) ***We said: O fire! Be coolness and peace to Abraham;***

This was a *takwīnī* (generative, creative, existential) command to the fire, whereby its characteristics of heat, burning and destruction were transformed into coolness and peace in relation to Abraham through a miraculous and extraordinary way (*kharq al-ʿādah*). Therefore, it is clear that there is no way for us to fully comprehend how this happened, because rational discussions of natural occurrences are only possible when we have knowledge of ordinary causal factors that occur recurrently. Since we do not know the underlying links that run miraculous acts, we cannot analyze them rationally, but we know overall that the attention and determination of one's soul has something to do with them. We addressed this in our discussion on miracles in the first volume of this book [under verse 2:23].

The verse is not connected to the previous verse by a conjunction since it starts with: *We said…* This is because it is an answer to an implied question which is omitted for brevity. What is meant more elaborately is something along these lines: "Thus they lit a fire and threw him in it. Then it is as if one asks: What happened next? So the verse replies: *We said: O fire! Be coolness and peace to Abraham*…." The same point would explain why the earlier verses of the narrative start similarly with *qāla* (he said) and *qālū* (they said).

وَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَخْسَرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(21:70) ***And they intended a scheme against him but We made them***

the greatest losers.

The meaning is: They plotted against him to extinguish his light and invalidate his argument, but We made them the greatest losers. Their first loss was that their scheme fell flat on its face and was ineffective. Then they suffered a further loss as God made him dominate them through His protection and deliverance.

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وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَلُوطًا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

(21:71) ***And We delivered him as well as Lūṭ (removing them) to the land which We had blessed for all people.***

The land referred to here is the Levant to which Abraham fled. Lot was the first to believe in him and fled with him. God says: *And Lot believed in Him, and he said: I am fleeing to my Lord* (29:26).

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً ۖ وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا صَالِحِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(21:72) ***And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, as an additional gift* (nāfilatan)*, and We made (them) all good.***

Nāfilah means gift. The meaning of these two verses [21:71-72] has been discussed repeatedly.

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وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ ۖ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(21:73) ***And We made them Imams who guided (people) by Our command* (bi-amrinā)*, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of alms, and Us (alone) did they serve.***

This verse apparently refers to the placement of imamate (leadership) in Abraham's progeny, as indicated by other verses.[1] The pronoun "them" in "*We made them*" refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Apparently *Imams who guided (people) by Our command* is meant to interpret the meaning of imamate. The meaning of "the Imam guiding by God's command" was addressed in a previous volume in our discussion on the verse: *Surely I will make you an Imam of men* (2:124).

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What should be clarified here is that this guidance, which is one of the

1 For instance, He says: *And he made it a word to continue in his posterity* (43:28), and other verses. (Author)

aspects of imamate, does not mean showing the way, because God made Abraham an Imam *after* making him a prophet, as we explained above in our exposition of the verse: *Surely I will make you an Imam of men…* (2:124). Prophethood is inseparable from guiding in the sense of *showing* the way. Therefore, what is meant by guidance in imamate must be the role of *taking* the people to the destination, which is a type of generative control and existential intervention in the souls by facilitating their advance toward perfection and moving them from one spiritual position to another.

Since this is an existential control and an inward manipulation, the command by which they guide is not a conventional and legislative command. Instead, it is the kind of command that is explained in His words: *His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it: Be, so it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the kingdom of all things* (36:82-83). Therefore, this command refers to spiritual effusions and inward stations to which the believers are guided through their righteous acts, and by which they are immersed in their Lord's mercy.

The letter *bāʾ* in *bi-amrinā* ("by" in "by Our command) indicates the means or instruments of God's guidance. This shows that the Imam, who guides *by* God's command, must be characterized by this guidance to begin with. Then guidance spreads from him among the people according to their different levels and capacities.. Hence, the Imam is the link between the people and their Lord in receiving inward effusions from God and passing them to the people, just as the prophet is a link between the people and their Lord in receiving outward effusions—that is, the codes of divine law—that descend upon him via revelation and then disseminate among the people through him. The Imam is a guide who directs the souls to their [existential and spiritual] stations, just as the prophet is a guide who directs the people to true beliefs and righteous acts. Prophethood and imamate may be held together, as was the case in Abraham and his two sons.

… and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of alms: The verse says that We revealed to them the "doing" of good deeds, where "doing" is a gerund or unconjugated verb (*maṣdar*). The usage of a gerund in this way—where an unconjugated verb is coupled with its object—indicates the external occurrence and realization of the act.[1] If one wants to convey that the act has not taken

1 In this case the verb is "to do" and its object is "good" which is annexed to it. (Trans.)

place, then one should either not annex the verb's object to it, or one should use a conjugated verb with the Arabic particles *an* or *anna* before it. These two particles turn a conjugated verb into a *maṣdar* (unconjugated verb, infinitive, gerund,).[1] This is what al-Jurjānī says in *Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*. Therefore, if we say, "I like your being kind and doing good" or when God says, *and Allah was not going to make your believing* (īmānakum) *to be fruitless* (2:43), the statement shows the occurrence of the act indicated by the *maṣdar*.[2] But if we say, "I would like you to be kind and to do good" or when God says, *and that you fast* (an taṣūmū) *is better for you* (2:184), the statement does not show that the verb has already taken place. That is why the verses that call the people to religion or legislate an act are usually expressed with the Arabic particle *an* coupled with a conjugated verb, as opposed to a *maṣdar* (gerund, infinitive, unconjugated verb). For example He says: *I am only commanded to serve* (ʿan aʿbuda) *Allah* (13:36); *that you shall not serve* (an lā taʿbudū) *aught but Him* (12:40); *And that you should keep up* (an aqīmū) *prayer* (6:72).

… and We revealed to them the doing of good: Given the above explanation, this statement indicates the occurrence of the "good-doing," meaning that the object of revelation was their *very acts* [not the *command* to act]. In other words, these deeds which issued from them were coupled and concomitant with revelation and an inward divine direction. This is different from legislative revelation (*al-waḥy al-tashrīʿī*), which firstly legislates an action, and then one performs the act according to what has been legislated.

… and Us (alone) did they serve: This supports what we said above, because it suggests that they *used to* serve God *prior* to the above mentioned revelation, and then they were further supported by that special revelation. Their previous service to Him was through actions legislated for them by prior legislative revelation. Hence, the subsequent revelation of the good-doing was of the nature of support and strengthening

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1 This would be equivalent to using particle "to" in English. "We revealed to them *to do good*" would be equivalent to "We revealed to them *the doing of good*" except that the former implies a command to be performed in future, while the latter implies an action (that is, the doing of good) which has taken place in the past. (Trans.)

2 In this case, being kind, doing good and believing are gerunds or unconjugated verbs (sing. *maṣdar*). (Trans.)

[inwardly], not a matter of legislation [outwardly].

The overall meaning is that they were supported by the Holy Spirit and purity, guided by a divine power that drove them to do good, keep up the prayer, and give alms (*zakāh*). "Alms" here refers to the specific charitable contribution according to their code of religious law (shariah).

The exegetes have interpreted the verse based on revelation being of legislative nature. This has raised some problems for them. Firstly, the object of this kind of revelation should be a verb that is to be done, not a *maṣdar* (unconjugated verb, gerund) [such as "good-doing"].[1] Secondly, legislation applies both to the prophets and their nations, but the verse ascribes revelation specifically to the former.

According to al-Zamakhsharī, the "doing of good" and what follows it—the "keeping up of prayer" and "the giving of alms"—are gerunds that serve as objects (sing. *maf*ᶜ*ūl*). The meaning is: "We revealed to them that good should be done (in passive form)…"[2] Thus both objections are overcome because stating a gerund in the sense of an object is equivalent to stating a conjugated verb. This solves the first problem. Moreover, since the verb is in the passive form, the subjects could be both the prophets and their nations. This solves the second problem. The exegetes have debated over his points extensively.

There are two problems with his explanation: (1) A gerund in the sense of an object is *not* equivalent to a conjugated verb. (2) As we said above, using a gerund implies the external occurrence and realization of the act, and this cannot be an object of legislative revelation.

The story of Abraham was mentioned above in the exposition of Sūrah al-Anᶜām [under verses 6:74-83], and the story of Jacob in the exposition of Sūrah Yūsuf. The story of Isaac is coming up in the exposition of Sūrah al-Ṣaffāt [under verses 37:112-113], by the will of God.

وَلُوطًا آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ تَعْمَلُ الْخَبَائِثَ ۗ إِنَّهُمْ

1 In other words, the object of legislative revelation should be an order to do an action, not the occurrence of an action. (Trans.)

2 In other words, *fiᶜl al-khayrāt* means "the good deed that is done," *iqām al-ṣalāh* means "the prayer that is performed," and *ītāʾ al-zakāh* means "the alms that are given." These are the objects of doing, praying and giving, respectively, mentioned in passive form. (Trans.)

كَانُوا قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَاسِقِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾ وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُ فِي رَحْمَتِنَا ۖ إِنَّهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(21:74-75) ***And (as for) Lot, We gave him wisdom* (ḥukman)** ***and knowledge, and We delivered him from the town which wrought abominations* (al-khabāʾith)*; surely they were an evil people, transgressors; And We took him into Our mercy; surely he was of the good.***

Ḥukm here means either "settlement of disputes (that is, judgment)" or "wisdom." The town which wrought abominations was Sodom, where Lot settled after his migration with Abraham. *Al-khabāʾith* means "abominable and abhorrent acts." Mercy here means either "*wilāyah* (guardianship, protection)" or "prophethood." Both meanings would be plausible. The story of Lot was mentioned above in the exposition of Sūrah Hud [under verses 11:77-83].

وَنُوحًا إِذْ نَادَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٦﴾

(21:76-77) ***And Noah, when he cried aforetime, so We answered him, and delivered him and his household* (ahl)** ***from the great calamity* (al-karb al-ʿaẓīm).**

It means: "Remember Noah, who called his Lord before Abraham and others who were mentioned above, and thus We answered his call." God narrates his call as follows: *I am overcome; come Thou then to help* (54:10). His "household" (*ahl*) means his close relatives except his wife and his son who drowned. *Karb* means "profound sorrow."

وَنَصَرْنَاهُ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمَ سَوْءٍ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(21:77) ***And We helped him against the people who rejected Our communications; surely they were an evil people, so We drowned them all.***

"Help" (*naṣr*) here implies a sense of "deliverance." That is why it is made transitive with the particle *min* (lit. "from," but here translated as "against"). The rest is clear. The story of Noah was referred to above in the exposition of Sūrah Hūd [under verses 11:25-49].

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: Abraham opposed his people and repudiated their gods… *So they went*

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away from him, turning back (37:90) to a festival of theirs. Thereupon, Abraham went to the gods with an adze, smashed them all except for their chief, and placed the adze around its neck. When the people returned to their gods and saw what had been done to them they said: "No, by God! No one could have been bold against them and broken them but he who repudiated them and disassociated himself from them." Burning him in fire was their most severe way of killing him.

They gathered good firewood for him[1] until it was the day when they were supposed to burn him. Nimrod and his hosts came out on that day to a building that had been raised for him to see how he [Abraham] would be consumed by the fire. Abraham was put in a catapult, then the earth said: "O My Lord! There is no one other than him on my face who worships You. Is he to be burned with fire?" The Lord replied: "If he calls Me, I will suffice him."[2] Abraham's prayer that day was: "O One, O One! O Independent, O Independent! O He Who begets not nor was begotten, and there is no counterpart for Him!" Then he said, "In God I trust." God said: "You have been sufficed!" He ordered the fire: "*Be coolness*," whereby Abraham's teeth started chattering from the cold. So God added: *and peace to Abraham* (21:69). At that point Gabriel descended, sat with Abraham and started conversing with him in the fire.

Nimrod said: "Whoever wants to adopts a god should adopt one like Abraham's God!" One of his chiefs claimed, "Surely I recited a formula upon the fire so that it would not burn him" but then a spark from the fire came out toward him and burned him…

Lot believed in him [Abraham]. Then he, Sarah and Lot migrated to the Levant.[3]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Surely when Abraham smashed Nimrod's

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1 According to another version: "They gathered firewood for him and kept him in custody." (Trans.)

2 *Rawḍat al-kāfī*: ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm said on the authority of his father, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr, on the authority of Abān b. ʿUthmān, on the authority of Ḥujr.

3 *Ibid*., on the authority of Abān, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Marwān, on the authority of "him who narrated it."

idols, Nimrod ordered that he should be tied up and they should dig a pit for him, gather firewood in it, and kindle a fire there. Abraham was flung into the fire to be burned, and they left him there until the fire went out. Then they came back and looked down in the pit, and there was Abraham, safe and free from his bonds.

When Nimrod was informed about his story, he ordered them to expatriate Abraham from his lands but not let him take livestock and possessions. Abraham argued with them about that and said: "If you take my livestock and possessions, then it is my right against you that you should return to me the part of my life that I have spent in your lands." They took the dispute before Nimrod's judge and he ruled that Abraham should hand over to them everything that he had acquired in their lands, and ruled that Nimrod's people should give back to Abraham the part of his life that he had spent in their lands. When Nimrod was informed of this he commanded them to let him go with his livestock and possessions, and ordered them to expatriate him. He said, "If he stays in your lands, he will corrupt your religion and harm your gods"…[1]

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: When Abraham was thrown in the fire, Gabriel met him in mid-air while he was swooping down. He told him, "O Abraham, do you need anything?" He replied, "Not from you!"[2]

Author's comment: The story of his being thrown with a catapult appears in a number of Sunni and Shia narrations. Similarly, Gabriel's question, "Do you need anything?" and his reply "Not from you" are narrated through both chains.

(4) Concerning verse 21:69 (*We said: O fire! Be coolness*), ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib said: It [the fire] became cold for him to the point that it was about to hurt him, until it was ordered, *and peace*—such that you do not hurt him.[3]

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1 *Ibid*. on the authority of ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm, on the authority of his father and a number of our co-religionists, on the authority of Sahl b. Ziyād, all on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, on the authority of Ibrāhīm b. Abī Ziyād al-Karkhī.

2 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration back to ʿAbd-Allāh b. Hilāl.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Fariyābī, Ibn Abī Shaybah and

(5) In a narration about imamate, al-Riḍā said: Then God honoured him [Abraham] by placing it [imamate] in his progeny and those who have been chosen and purified. He says: *And We granted him Isaac and Jacob, as an additional gift, and We made (them) all good. And We made them Imams who guided (people) by Our command, and We revealed to them the doing of good and the keeping up of prayer and the giving of alms, and Us (alone) did they serve* (21:72-73). Thus it remained in his descendants, one inheriting it from another, generation after generation, until the Prophet inherited it. God says: *Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe and Allah is the guardian of the believers* (3:68). So it [imamate] was a special position [exclusively for the Prophet]. Then he [the Prophet] hung it [that is, the medal of imamate] on the neck of ʿAlī by God's command and as He had prescribed. Thus it passed to his pure progeny to whom God has given knowledge and faith, as He says: *And those who are given knowledge and faith will say: Certainly you tarried according to the ordinance of Allah till the Day of Resurrection* (30:56). It is exclusively in the descendants of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib until the Day of Resurrection because there is no prophet after Muḥammad.[1]

(6) Concerning verse 21:72 (*And We granted him Isaac and Jacob, as a* nāfilah) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The son of a son is a *nāfilah*.[2]

(7) Concerning verse 21:74 (*and We delivered him from the town which wrought abominations*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They used to have sexual intercourse with other men.

Author's comment: There are very many narrations on the story of Abraham. However they differ significantly from one another in details that are not traceable to the text of the Qur'an. We shall suffice to the ones mentioned above. We stated what can be deduced about his story from God's Book in our exposition of Sūrah al-Anʿām [under verses 6:74-83].

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Ibn Jarīr.

1 *Al-Kāfī* and *ʿUyun akhbār al-Riḍā*.

2 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Yaḥyā b. ʿImrān.

Verses 78-91

وَدَاوُودَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِي الْحَرْثِ إِذْ نَفَشَتْ فِيهِ غَنَمُ الْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ
شَاهِدِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَفَهَّمْنَاهَا سُلَيْمَانَ وَكُلاًّ آتَيْنَا حُكْماً وَعِلْماً وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُودَ
الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ وَكُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾ وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَكُمْ
لِتُحْصِنَكُمْ مِنْ بَأْسِكُمْ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ شَاكِرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾ وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً
تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ إِلَى الأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَالِمِينَ ﴿٨١﴾ وَمِنْ
الشَّيَاطِينِ مَنْ يَغُوصُونَ لَهُ وَيَعْمَلُونَ عَمَلاً دُونَ ذَلِكَ وَكُنَّا لَهُمْ حَافِظِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾
وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ
فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَذِكْرَى
لِلْعَابِدِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِدْرِيسَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ كُلٌّ مِنْ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُمْ
فِي رَحْمَتِنَا إِنَّهُمْ مِنْ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾ وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِباً فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ
عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لا إِلَهَ إِلاَّ أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنْ الظَّالِمِينَ
﴿٨٧﴾ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنْ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُنْجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾ وَزَكَرِيَّا إِذْ نَادَى
رَبَّهُ رَبِّ لا تَذَرْنِي فَرْداً وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْوَارِثِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ يَحْيَى
وَأَصْلَحْنَا لَهُ زَوْجَهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَيَدْعُونَنَا رَغَباً وَرَهَباً
وَكَانُوا لَنَا خَاشِعِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾ وَالَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَجَعَلْنَاهَا
وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(21:78) *And David and Solomon when they were giving judgment concerning the field when the people's sheep pastured therein by night, and We were bearers of witness to their judgment.*

(21:79) *So We made Solomon understand it; and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge; and We subdued the mountains and the*

birds to celebrate Our praise with David; and We were the doers.

(21:80) *And We taught him the making of coats of mail for you, that they might protect you in your wars; will you then be grateful?*

(21:81) *And (We made subservient) to Solomon the wind blowing violent, pursuing its course by his command to the land which We had blessed, and We are the Knower of all things.*

(21:82) *And of the devils there were those who dived for him and did other work besides that, and We kept guard over them;*

(21:83) *And Job, when he cried to his Lord, (saying): Harm has afflicted me, and Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful.*

(21:84) *Therefore We responded to him and took away what harm he had, and We gave him his family and the like of them with them: a mercy from Us and a reminder to the worshipers.*

(21:85) *And Ishmael and Idrīs and Ezekiel; all were of the patient ones;*

(21:86) *And We caused them to enter into Our mercy, surely they were of the good ones.*

(21:87) *And Dhū al-Nūn, when he went away in wrath, so he thought that We would not straiten him, so he called out in the darkness: There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee; surely I was among the wrongdoers.*

(21:88) *So We responded to him and delivered him from grief and thus do We deliver the believers.*

(21:89) *And Zechariah, when he cried to his Lord: O my Lord leave me not alone; and Thou art the best of inheritors.*

(21:90) *So We responded to him and gave him John and made his wife fit for him; surely they used to hasten with one another in deeds of goodness and to call upon Us hoping and fearing, and they were humble before Us.*

(21:91) *And she who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our spirit and made her and her son a sign for the nations.*

Introduction

These verses refer to a number of other prophets—David (Dāwūd), Solomon (Sulaymān), Job (Ayyūb), Ishmael (Ismāʿīl), Enoch (Idrīs), Ezekiel (Dhū al-Kifl), Jonah (Dhū al-Nūn, Yūnus), Zechariah (Zakariyyā), John the Baptist (Yaḥyā) and Jesus (ʿĪsā). They are mentioned neither in chronological nor reverse chronological order, just like the previous

verses. In the case of some, God describes some of His great blessings that He bestowed upon them, and in the case of others He only mentions their names.

Commentary

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وَدَاوُودَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ يَحْكُمَانِ فِي الْحَرْثِ إِذْ نَفَشَتْ فِيهِ غَنَمُ الْقَوْمِ وَكُنَّا لِحُكْمِهِمْ شَاهِدِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾ فَفَهَّمْنَاهَا سُلَيْمَانَ وَكُلاًّ آتَيْنَا حُكْماً وَعِلْماً وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُودَ الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ وَكُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(21:78-79) ***And David and Solomon when they were giving judgment concerning the field*** **(al-ḥarth)** ***when the people's sheep pastured*** **(nafashat, from nafsh)** ***therein by night, and We were bearers of witness to their judgment.So We made Solomon understand it; and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge; and We subdued the mountains and the birds to celebrate Our praise with David; and We were the doers.***

Ḥarth means "cultivation." It can also mean "vineyard." *Nafsh* means "pasturing livestock at night." *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: "*Nafash* and *nafsh* mean camels or sheep spreading out at night and pasturing without a herder.'"

And David and Solomon when they were giving judgment concerning the field **(al-ḥarth)** ***when the people's sheep pastured therein by night:*** The context indicates that this was a specific incident that was litigated before David because he was the king who ruled the Israelites. God made him a successor in the earth, as He says: *O David! Surely We have made you a successor in the land; so judge between men with justice* (38:26). If Solomon was brought into deciding on the incident, it was with David's permission and for some reason—perhaps to show his worthiness of being David's heir.

Obviously, it makes no sense for two judges to decide about a single case while both maintain autonomy in judgment and rule. This shows that *when they gave judgment* means their consultation and exchange of opinion regarding the verdict, not issuing final judgment. This is wholly supported by saying *when they were giving judgment* in the progressive tense, which suggests that they were gradually building their way toward a verdict which was not yet achieved, and was yet to be completed as a single decisive rule to be implemented. Otherwise the verse should have

said "when they ruled" [in the perfect tense] (*idh ḥakamā*).

***… and We were bearers of witness to their judgment* (li-ḥukmihim):** This also supports the above interpretation, because apparently the pronoun "their" [in the plural form, as opposed to the dual form] refers to all prophets, whom He has repeatedly described as being given *ḥukm* (judgment, wisdom). Some have suggested that the pronoun refers to David, Solomon and the plaintiffs. However, there is no justification for attributing judgment to the plaintiffs. Therefore, "their judgment" was a single judgment, which is the judgment of all prophets. Apparently this judgment was that the owner of the flock bears the responsibility for the property destroyed by his flock.

Thus, there was a single judgment, but they disagreed over how it should be *applied and executed*. If their disagreement were over the actual verdict, meaning that each of them had his own judgment, then it must have been one of the following:

(1) Both rulings were correct, but one of them abrogated the other. That would be Solomon's rule which abrogated David's, as per His words: *So We made Solomon understand it* (21:79).

(2) Their judgments were according to *ijtihad*, meaning speculative personal opinion where the person does not know the real rule. Then He verified that Solomon's personal judgment (*ijtihād*) matched the real rule.

The problem with the first view—that Solomon's judgment abrogated David's—is that it contravenes the apparent meaning of the sentences in the verse, because abrogation applies when there are two distinct judgments. If that were the case, then the verse should have indicated that their rules were distinct from one another by saying, "We were bearers of witness to the judgment [in singular form]—or to the two judgments [in dual form]—of both of them" (li-ḥukmihimā or li-ḥukmayhimā).[1] However, it says: *We were bearers of witness to their judgment* (li-ḥukmayhim).[2] This expression suggests the unity of their judgment. If David's judgment in the case had been abrogated, then it would be erroneous, while the verse says that God was witness to their judgment, which suggests that they were free from error. Moreover, that would contravene His Words: "and

1 In other words, a noun in the singular or dual form should have been annexed to a possessive pronoun in the dual form. (Trans.)

2 That is, a singular noun is annexed to a plural possessive pronoun. (Trans.)

to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge" (21:79), which suggests confirmation and shows approval.

The second view—that their rulings were based on their *ijtihad* while being ignorant of God's true ruling—is even more unlikely than the first one, because He says: *So We made Solomon understand it* (21:79), which implies Solomon's knowledge of God's true rule. How can this expression apply to a speculative opinion? Moreover, He then says: *and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge* (21:79), which confirms that David's judgment was also based on knowledge, not speculative personal opinion. If this statement—*and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge*—were not applicable to David's judgment, then there would be no justification for saying it here.

Furthermore, *and We were bearers of witness to their judgment* hints that there was only one judgment and it was protected from error, as we said above [because "judgment" is singular]. Hence, the only plausible interpretation is to say that their judgment was one in itself, but different in terms of how it should be *applied and executed*. In this sense, Solomon's judgment was more accurate and moderate.

The Shia and Sunni narrations on this can be summarized as follows: David ruled that the owner of the field should be given the actual livestock, but Solomon ruled that he should receive the proceeds of their milk, wool and produce in that year.

Perhaps the main judgment was that the field owner should be compensated for the crops that were destroyed by the flock, and that was equal in value to the livestock. That is why David ruled that the owner of the field should receive the actual livestock. Solomon's rule achieved the same goal in a more lenient way, namely that the property loss he had suffered should be compensated out of the proceeds of that year. The annual proceeds of livestock every year are normally equivalent to the value of the actual livestock.

The implied meaning of *And David and Solomon when* (idh) *they were giving judgment concerning the field when* (idh) *the people's sheep pastured therein by night* is: "*Remember* when David and Solomon…" The word *idh* here means *ḥīn* (when, as, while). The sheep scattered in the field at night and spoiled it. *And We were bearers of witness to their judgment*: that is, the judgment of the prophets. Some have said that the pronoun "their" refers to David, Solomon and the plaintiff, but you already know

the problem with that. Others have said that the pronoun refers to David and Solomon, because the plural is also used for two. Clearly this is also an unwarranted claim. *We were bearers of witness* means that We were present with them, seeing, hearing and aiding them to follow the right path. *So We made Solomon understand it*: We made him understand the [appropriate] rule and judgment. *And to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge*: that is, to both David and Solomon. Some have suggested that this pertains to the beginning of the verse [21:78]. The implied meaning would then be: "We gave David and Solomon wisdom and knowledge when they were giving judgment…"

… and We subdued* (sakhkharnā, from taskhīr) *the mountains and the birds to celebrate Our praise with David: *Taskhīr* means "subjecting something someone such that it acts in favor of the subduer's objectives." This is different from compulsion (*ijbār*), coercion (*ikrāh*) and constraint (*qasr*), because the doer in those cases acts contrary to its choice or nature, but the doer in *taskhīr* follows its nature and choice. For example, when one uses fire to burn wood, the fire is subdued to burn but it is not constrained. Similarly, one who is hired to work is subdued by his employer but he is not forced or compelled.

This explains what is meant by subduing the mountains and the birds to celebrate [God's] praise with David even though they already praise God in themselves. It means the *synchronization* of their inherent celebration of praise with David's. Thus, "to celebrate Our praise" (*yusabbiḥna*) explains "We subdued [them] with David" (*wa sakhkharnā maʿa Dāwūd*). The conjunction "and" joins "the birds" to "the mountains."[1]

… and We were the doers: That is: The likes of these gifts and graces have always been part of Our custom; the blessings that We bestowed upon them were nothing new for Us.

وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ صَنْعَةَ لَبُوسٍ لَّكُمْ لِتُحْصِنَكُمْ مِنْ بَأْسِكُمْ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ شَاكِرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(21:80) ***And We taught him the making of coats of mail* (labūsin) *for you, that they might protect you in your wars* (baʾsikum)*; will you then be grateful?***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says: "*Labūs* is a name for all weaponry according

1 In the Arabic text of the verse, "the mountains" and "the birds" are separated by *yusabbiḥna*. (Trans.)

to the Arabs… It is also said that it means armor." *Al-Mufradāt* says: "*The making of* labūs *for you* refers to 'armors.' "

Baʾs means intensity and fierceness in fighting. Apparently in this verse it means the intensity of weapon strikes. The pronoun "him" in *And We taught him* refers to David—as He says elsewhere: *and We made the iron pliant to him* (34:10). It means: And We taught David the making of armor for you. That is, We taught him how to make for you coats of mail that would protect you and prevent the force of the weaponry falling on you.

… ***Will you then be grateful:*** this urges and encourages the audience to show gratitude.

وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ عَاصِفَةً تَجْرِى بِأَمْرِهِ إِلَى الأَرْضِ الَّتِى بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَكُنَّا بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَالِمِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

(21:81) ***And (We made subservient) to Solomon the wind blowing violent* (al-rīḥ ʿāṣifatan)*, pursuing its course by his command to the land which We had blessed, and We are the knower of all things.***

The "and" at the beginning of the verse joins it to "with David." That is: We made subdued to Solomon *al-rīḥ ʿāṣifatan* (meaning, the wind that blows violently) *pursuing its course by his command to the land which We had blessed*: that is, the Levant where Solomon dwelt, "and We are the knower of all things."

The wind was subservient to him in both its violent and gentle states, as He says: *to run gently wherever he desired* (38:36). The current verse, however, specifically mentions its violent state because its subservience is more astounding and better indicative of His [or his] power.

Some exegetes have said:

The verse only mentions the wind taking Solomon *to* the Blessed land by his command but not *away* from it, because he was a resident of that land for most of the time. This is a clearer indication of God's blessing upon him.

Perhaps the verse is referring to the wind's movement "to" that land by his command in order to carry him from it to wherever he wanted, not its movement "to" that land to return him and drop him off after carrying him "away". Based on this explanation, the verse would apply to both the leaving and returning of the wind.

وَمِنْ الشَّيَاطِينِ مَنْ يَغُوصُونَ لَهُ وَيَعْمَلُونَ عَمَلاً دُونَ ذَلِكَ وَكُنَّا لَهُمْ حَافِظِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(21:82) ***And of the devils there were those who dived for him and did other work besides that, and We kept guard over them;***

The devils would dive to extract sea resources such as pearls. God has described *other work besides that* elsewhere as follows: *They made for him what he pleased of fortresses and images, and bowls (large) as watering-troughs and cooking-pots that will not move from their place* (34:13). "Keeping guard over the devils" means keeping them in his service and preventing them from escape, disobedience, and corruption of his affairs. The meaning is clear. The stories of David and Solomon shall come up in Sūrah Saba' [under verses 34:10-14], by God's will.

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(21:83) ***And Job, when he cried to his Lord, (saying): Harm*** **(al-ḍurr)** ***has afflicted me, and Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful.***

The word *ḍarr* is used for any kind of harm, but *ḍurr* is used for harms that specifically afflict one's life, such as illness and emaciation.

Job was enveloped by calamity. He lost his property, his children died, and he was afflicted in his body with a severe illness for a protracted period. He then called to God and complained to Him about his condition. Thus God answered his prayer, delivered him from his illness, and returned his property and children to him—along with the like of them, as He says in the subsequent verse.

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِ مِنْ ضُرٍّ ۖ وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْعَابِدِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(21:84) ***Therefore We responded to him and took away what harm he had, and We gave him his family and the like of them with them: a mercy from Us and a reminder to the worshipers.***

We responded to him and took away what harm he had: We delivered him from his illness and healed him; *and We gave him his family*, meaning those of his children who had died. *And a reminder to the worshipers*: so that they would remember and know that God tests His friends with a trial from Him for them, then gives them their reward. He does not waste the reward of the good-doers.

Job's story is coming up in Sūrah Ṣāḍ [under verses 38:41-44], if God wills.

وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِدْرِيسَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ ۖ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُمْ فِي رَحْمَتِنَا ۖ إِنَّهُمْ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(21:85-86) ***And Ishmael and Idrīs and Ezekiel; all were of the patient ones; And We caused them to enter into Our mercy, surely they were of the good ones.***

The story of Idrīs (Enoch) was presented above in Sūrah Maryam [under verses 19:56-57]. The story of Ishmael is coming up in Sūrah Ṣaffāt [under verses 37:10], and Ezekiel's (Dhū al-Kifl's) story is coming up in Sūrah Ṣād [under verse 38:48], by the will of God.

وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَىٰ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(21:87) ***And Dhū al-Nūn, when he went away in wrath, so he thought that We would not straiten him*** **(lan naqdira ʿalayhi)**, ***so he called out in the darkness: There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee; surely I was among the wrongdoers.***

Nūn means "fish." Dhū al-Nūn is Prophet Jonah (Yūnus), son of Amittai (Mattā), who was swallowed by a great fish. He was sent to the people of Nineveh and called them [to God's religion], but they did not believe in him. Thus he asked God to punish them. When the punishment was about to descend upon them, they repented and believed, so God removed the punishment from them. Since Jonah had departed his people, God tested him with a great fish that swallowed him. Thereupon he called God in the fish's belly, and thus God delivered him and sent him to his people for a second time.

And Dhū al-Nūn: that is, remember Dhū al-Nūn; *when he went away in wrath*, enraged by his people when they did not believe in him. It has been said that *naqdira* here means *nuḍayyiqa* (straiten, stint, narrow down on), similar to how it is said *qudira ʿalayhi rizquhu*[1] when one's provision and livelihood is tightened.

It could also be that the clause, *when he went away in wrath, so he*

1 This sense of *qadara*, meaning the tightening of sustenance, is used in the following verses: 13:26, 17:30, 28:82, 29:62, 30:37, 34:36, 34:39, 39:52, 42:12, 65:7, 89:16. (Trans.)

thought that We would not straiten him is meant as an analogy. That is, his departure and going away from his people was "like" the departure of a slave who is angry with his master and thinks that his master would have no power over him (*lan yaqdira ʿalayhi*), such that if he flees from him his master he would have no control over him. As for Jonah truly being angry with his Lord and thinking that God would seriously have no power over him, it is something which is indubitably far from the noble prophets, for they are infallible by God's protection.

… so he called out in the (layers of) darkness: This is subsequent to some parts that are omitted for brevity. The implied meaning is: "God then tested him with the great fish that swallowed him. Then he called to his Lord in its belly." It has been said that the "layers of darkness" (*al-ẓulumāt*, in plural form) refer to the darkness of the sea, the darkness of the fish's belly, and the darkness of the night.

… There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee: Here he disassociates himself from what leaving without order seemed like. His departure resembled—even though he did not intend this—the idea that he can resort to someone or somewhere apart from his Lord. That is why he disassociated himself from it by saying: *There is no god but You*. His departure could also resemble the idea that one can be critical of God's action and be enraged by it, and one can thwart Him and escape from the domain of His power. Hence, he also disassociated himself from this by proclaiming God's purity by saying: *Glory be to Thee*.

… surely I was among the wrongdoers: Here he acknowledges wrongdoing in the sense that he performed an action that resembled wrongdoing, even though what he did was not really wrongdoing, nor had he intended to do wrong and disobey. This is God's way of disciplining and correcting His prophet, so that he would tread on the carpet of nearness with his will cleared of *resembling* any wrongdoing, let alone any *actual* wrongdoing.

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُنْجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(21:88) ***So We responded to him and delivered him from grief*** **(al-ghamm)** ***and thus do We deliver the believers.***

He did not state any explicit request or prayer, but only declared God's unity and purity and confessed to wrongdoing. Yet, this was itself an expression of his condition and position with respect to his Lord, an

implicit request for deliverance and exemption. Thus God responded to him and delivered him from *al-ghamm*, which is the grief that had befallen him.

… and thus do We deliver the believers: This is a promise of deliverance to any believer who is tested with grief and then calls out to his Lord similarly to Jonah. His story is coming up in Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt [under verses 37:139-148], if God wills.

وَزَكَرِيَّا إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْنِي فَرْدًا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْوَارِثِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

(21:89) ***And Zechariah, when he cried to his Lord: O my Lord leave me not alone; and Thou art the best of inheritors.***

This verse is joined with a conjunction to the command "remember" that was implied at the beginning of the previous stories. The meaning is: And remember Zechariah, when he cried out to his Lord asking for a son.

O my Lord leave me not alone…: This is what he cried for. "Not leaving him alone" means not leaving him childless; without a child to inherit from him.

… and Thou art the best of inheritors: These words show praise and extolment of God, but they also imply a declaration of God's purity in this context. What Zechariah said above—*leave me not alone*—was equivalent to asking for an inheritor, but God is the One Who inherits everything. Thus he proclaimed that God is free from having any associate in inheritance, and declared Him to be above being equal to anyone else by saying: *and You are the best of inheritors.*

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ يَحْيَىٰ وَأَصْلَحْنَا لَهُ زَوْجَهُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَيَدْعُونَنَا رَغَبًا وَرَهَبًا ۖ وَكَانُوا لَنَا خَاشِعِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

(21:90) ***So We responded to him and gave him John and made his wife fit for him; surely they used to hasten with one another in deeds of goodness and to call upon Us hoping and fearing, and they were humble before Us.***

"His wife" refers to Zechariah's wife, and "making her fit" apparently means that God made her young and fecund after being barren, as explicitly stated in his prayer: *and my wife is barren* (19:8).

… surely they used to hasten with one another in deeds of goodness and to call upon Us hoping **(raghaban)** ***and fearing*** **(rahaban)**, ***and they were humble*** **(khāshiʿīn, from khushūʿ)** ***before Us:*** The thread of the verse

shows that the pronoun "they" refers to Zechariah's household. It is as if this statement explains and justifies an implied idea by the previous discussion. That is: "We bestowed blessings upon them *because* they used to hasten with one another in deeds of goodness."

Raghab (hoping) and *rahab* (fearing) are two infinitives like *raghbah* and *rahbah*, meaning "desire" and "fear," respectively. They are participial elements that serve as either *tamyīz* or *ḥāl*.[1] The former would be if they retain their infinitival meaning, and the latter would be if the infinitive here has a subject meaning (that is, "those who hope" and "those who fear"; *rāghibīn wa rāhibīn*). *Khushūʿ* (humility) is a condition of the heart when it is affected and impressed due to facing some grandeur and magnificence.

The meaning is: We bestowed blessing upon them because they used to hasten with one another in deeds of goodness; they used to call upon Us, hoping for Our mercy and/or reward and fearing Our wrath and/or punishment—or alternatively: they used to call upon Us as those who are hopeful and fearful—and their hearts were humble before Us.

The story of Zechariah and John' was discussed above at the beginning of Sūrah Maryam [under verses 19:2-15].

وَالَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَجَعَلْنَاهَا وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

(21:91) ***And she who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our spirit and made her and her son a sign for the nations.***

"She who guarded her chastity" refers to Mary daughter of ʿImrān (Joachim). This description involves praise for her chastity and immaculateness, and refutes the Jews' accusation of her.[2]

… so We breathed into her of Our spirit: The pronoun "her" refers to Mary. The "breathing of spirit into her" is an indirect way of saying that Jesus was not born in the usual way, where there is the conception of the zygote (*nuṭfah*) first, then the blowing of spirit into it. Since there was no conception, what remains is only the blowing of the spirit—that is, the divine word—into her, as He says: *Surely the likeness of Jesus is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be,*

1 *Tamyīz* (or *tamīz*) is a participial form of a verb that serves to specify and clarify an ambiguity. *Ḥāl* is in the same form, but it serves to describe the condition of either the subject or the object in a sentence. (Trans.)

2 See verse 4:156. (Trans.)

and he was (3:59). Their similarity was in that their creation was needless of a fertilized sperm.

… and made her and her son a sign for the nations: The word "sign" (*āyah*) is singular, which means that they—that is, Mary and Jesus—are counted together as a single sign for all people. The sign was Jesus' extraordinary birth, which depends on both of them. Since Mary preceded Jesus in terms of time, God mentions her first by saying: "*and made her and her son*" instead of "and made her son and her."[1] Even though Mary was not a prophet, she is named among the prophets in the Book of God, and this alone is ample glory and pride for her.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning His words, *And David and Solomon when they gave judgment concerning the field when the people's sheep pastured therein* (21:78), Imam al-Bāqir said: They did not issue any judgment, but they were only debating with one another. Then He made Solomon understand it.[2]

Author's comment: The meaning of the hadith is clarified by what was discussed in the exposition of the verse.

(2) Abū Baṣīr says: "I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about God's words: *And David and Solomon when they gave judgment concerning the field when the people's sheep* nafashat (21:78)." He replied: *Nafsh* is pasturing only at night. The owner of a field has to protect his field only during the day, and the owner of livestock does not have to protect them during the day. He should herd and feed them during the day,[3] so he is not responsible for what they ruin, but the owner of livestock has to keep the livestock away from the people's fields at night, so if they spoil anything at night, then the owner is responsible. That is *nafsh*. David ruled that the person whose field was affected should receive the actual livestock. Solomon

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1 The opposite order is seen in verse 23:50. (Trans.)

2 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, on the authority of Jamīl b. Darrāj, on the authority of Zurārah.

3 There was a slight difference between the author's wording and the original hadith as in *al-Kāfī* here which does not alter the meaning. The translation is based on *al-Kāfī*. (Trans.)

ruled that he should receive their milk and wool for that year.[1]

(3) In another version of this narration, the Imam continues: David ruled in accordance with what the previous prophets had, but God revealed to Solomon: "The owner of a field is only entitled to what comes out of the insides of any flocks which pastured in the field." This became a new custom after Solomon. This is what is meant by God's words: *and to each one We gave wisdom and knowledge* (21:79). Thus, each of them ruled according to God's ruling.[2]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq says in a hadith: "The field was a vineyard in which the flock pastured." The Imam described Solomon's ruling and then added: "This was David's ruling, but he only wanted the Israelites to know that Solomon would be his successor. They did not disagree over the ruling, otherwise the verse would have said 'and We were bearers of witness to their two judgments (*ḥukmihuma*, in dual form)'."[3]

(5) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: There are different views about their rulings. It is said that the field was a vineyard where the grapes were just starting to grow. David ruled that the owner of the vineyard should receive the flock.

Then Solomon told him: "Change this and be more lenient, O Prophet of God!" He asked: "How?" He replied: "Give the vines to the owner of the flock, who should tend to them until they return to how they were. Give the flock to the owner of the vineyard and he will benefit from it until the vineyard is back as it was. Then give each of them back to its owner." This view is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

Author's comment: The field being a vineyard is also narrated via Sunni chains of narration, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd. There are other narrations from the Imams of the Prophet's Household with similar meanings to those cited above. What we said in the exposition of the verse

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn ibn Saʿīd, on the authority of one of our co-religionists, on the authority of al-Muʿallā Abū ʿUthmān.

2 *Ibid.*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

should suffice to clarify what is meant in these narrations.

(6) Concerning verse 21:81 *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "*And (We made subservient) to Solomon the wind blowing violent*—blowing from every side—*pursuing its course by his command to the land which We had blessed*—to Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis) and the Levant."

(7) Concerning verse 21:84 (*and We gave him his family and the like of them with them*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: God brought back to life those of his family who had died both before his trial and during his trial.[1]

(8) Imam al-Bāqir said: "*And Dhū al-Nūn, when he went away in wrath* due to the action of his people, *and thought that We would not straiten him*—he thought that he would not be punished for what he was doing."[2]

(9) Imam al-Riḍā said: Concerning His words, *And Dhū al-Nūn, when he went away in wrath and thought that We would not straiten him* (21:87), "he thought" (*ẓanna*) here means "he was certain" (*istayqana*). He was sure that God would not straiten his provision. Have you not heard God's words: *But when He tries him (differently),* fa-qadara ʿalayhi *his means of subsistence* (89:16)? It [*qadara ʿalayhi*] means "straitens against him" (*ḍayyaqa ʿayyaqa*). If he thought that God would "not have power over him" (*lā yaqdiru ʿalayhi*),[3] he would be an unbeliever.[4]

(10) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "There are four things for four things [that is, there are four verses for four problems]… The fourth one is for sorrow and worry: *There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee; surely I was among the wrongdoers* (21:87), [because then] God says: *So We responded to him and delivered him from grief and*

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1 *Ibid*., via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Bukayr and others.

2 *Ibid*., on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

3 The gist of this hadith is that *qadara* in verse 21:87 does not mean "having power," but it means "straitening" or "tightening," just as in verse 89:16. (Trans.)

4 *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣalt al-Harawī, in al-Rida's conversation with al-Maʿmūn about the infallibility of the prophets.

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thus do We deliver the believers (21:88)."[1]

Author's comment: The same idea is narrated in *al-Khiṣāl* from the Imam, via an incomplete chain of transmission (*mursal*).

(11) Saʿd has narrated: I heard God's Messenger saying: "A name of God that if He is called by it He will answer and if He is petitioned by it He will grant is the supplication of Jonah the son of Amittai." I asked: "O Messenger of God, was it exclusive to Jonah or is it for all Muslims?" He replied: "It was for Jonah in particular, but also for the believers if they call God by it. Have you not heard God's words: *and thus do We deliver the believers* (21:88)? So it is a stipulation by God for anyone who calls Him."[2]

(12) Concerning verse 21:90 (*and made his wife fit for him*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: She did not menstruate, but then she started menstruating.

(13) Concerning *raghaban wa rahaban* (21:90) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "It means *rāghibīna rāhibīna* (hoping and fearing, or those who hope and fear)." Concerning *she who guarded her chastity* (21:91) he said: "That is Mary; no being saw her." Concerning *so We breathed into her of Our spirit* (21:91) he said: "that is the spirit which is created; that is, of Our command."

(14) Imam Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar said: "*Raghbah* (hope) is to hold your palms up to heaven facing your face, and *rahbah* (fear) is to hold your palms facing downwards and lifting [your hands] up to your face."[3]

(15) A similar tradition to the above is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq: *Raghbah* is to hold the palms of your hands up heavenwards, and *rahbah* is to hold the backs of your hands heavenwards.[4]

1 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Zayyāt, on the authority of "a man," on the authority of Karrām.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr.

3 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAli ibn Jaʿfar, narrating from his brother.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Isḥāq.

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Verses 92-112

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٩٢﴾ وَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ
كُلٌّ إِلَيْنَا رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾ فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلا كُفْرَانَ لِسَعْيِهِ
وَإِنَّا لَهُ كَاتِبُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾ وَحَرَامٌ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَنَّهُمْ لا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾ حَتَّى إِذَا
فُتِحَتْ يَأْجُوجُ وَمَأْجُوجُ وَهُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ حَدَبٍ يَنسِلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾ وَاقْتَرَبَ الْوَعْدُ الْحَقُّ
فَإِذَا هِيَ شَاخِصَةٌ أَبْصَارُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا قَدْ كُنَّا فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هَذَا بَلْ
كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾ إِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ حَصَبُ جَهَنَّمَ أَنْتُمْ لَهَا
وَارِدُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾ لَوْ كَانَ هَؤُلاءِ آلِهَةً مَا وَرَدُوهَا وَكُلٌّ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾ لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ
وَهُمْ فِيهَا لا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ سَبَقَتْ لَهُمْ مِنَّا الْحُسْنَى أُوْلَئِكَ عَنْهَا
مُبْعَدُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾ لا يَسْمَعُونَ حَسِيسَهَا وَهُمْ فِي مَا اشْتَهَتْ أَنفُسُهُمْ خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ لا
يَحْزُنُهُمُ الْفَزَعُ الأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّاهُمُ الْمَلائِكَةُ هَذَا يَوْمُكُمُ الَّذِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ
﴿١٠٣﴾ يَوْمَ نَطْوِي السَّمَاءَ كَطَيِّ السِّجِلِّ لِلْكُتُبِ كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ وَعْداً
عَلَيْنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا
عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾ إِنَّ فِي هَذَا لَبَلاغاً لِقَوْمٍ عَابِدِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلاَّ رَحْمَةً
لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾ قُلْ إِنَّمَا يُوحَى إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٨﴾
فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُلْ آذَنْتُكُمْ عَلَى سَوَاءٍ وَإِنْ أَدْرِي أَقَرِيبٌ أَمْ بَعِيدٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٠٩﴾ إِنَّهُ
يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾ وَإِنْ أَدْرِي لَعَلَّهُ فِتْنَةٌ لَكُمْ
وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَى حِينٍ ﴿١١١﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ احْكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَرَبُّنَا الرَّحْمَنُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَى مَا
تَصِفُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

(21:92) *Surely this Islam is your religion, one religion (only), and I am*

your Lord; therefore, serve Me.

(21:93) *And they broke their religion (into sects) between them: to Us shall all come back.*

(21:94) *Therefore whoever shall do good deeds and he is a believer, there shall be no denying of his exertion, and surely We will write (it) down for him.*

(21:95) *And there is a ban on any town which We destroy that they shall not return.*

(21:96) *Until when Gog and Magog are let loose and they shall break forth from every elevated place.*

(21:97) *And the true promise shall draw nigh, then lo! The eyes of those who disbelieved shall be fixedly open: O woe to us! Surely we were in a state of heedlessness as to this; nay, we were unjust.*

(21:98) *Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the fire-wood of Hell; to it you shall come.*

(21:99) *Had these been gods, they would not have come to it, and all shall abide therein forever.*

(21:100) *For them therein shall be groaning and therein they shall not hear.*

(21:101) *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it;*

(21:102) *They will not hear its faintest sound, and they shall abide in that which their souls long for.*

(21:103) *The great fearful event shall not grieve them, and the angels shall meet them: This is your day which you were promised.*

(21:104) *On the day when We will roll up heaven like the rolling up of the scroll for writings, as We originated the first creation, (so) We shall return it; a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about.*

(21:105) *And certainly We wrote in the Book after the reminder that (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it.*

(21:106) *Most surely in this is a message to a people who serve.*

(21:107) *And We have not sent you but as a mercy to everyone.*

(21:108) *Say: It is only revealed to me that your Allah is only one Allah; will you then submit?*

(21:109) *But if they turn back, say: I have given you warning in fairness, and I do not know whether what you are threatened with*

is near or far:

(21:110) *Surely He knows what is spoken openly and He knows what you hide:*

(21:111) *And I do not know if this may be a trial for you and a provision till a time.*

(21:112) *He said: O my Lord! Judge Thou with truth; and our Lord is the Beneficent, Whose help is sought against what you ascribe (to Him).*

Introduction

These verses return to the beginning of the discourse in the chapter. It was explained above that humanity has One God, and that is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Thus, they have to serve Him through prophethood and responding to its call, which is how they can prepare for the reckoning on the Day of Judgment. Prophethood is a single universal call to one religion, and that is the religion of monotheism. This is what was called to by Moses before, by Abraham before him, by Noah before him, and by those who came after Moses and before Noah. God mentioned the names of some of them and a synopsis of His blessings upon them, such as Job, Enoch and others.

Thus, humanity is nothing but a single nation which has a single Lord which is God, and a single religion which is the religion of monotheism where God alone is worshiped. This is what defines the divine call. However, the people have broken the matter of their religion amongst themselves, have divided into various religions and schools, and have made up for themselves gods other than God and religions other than God's religion. That is why they have deviated from one another, pursuing different goals in their journeys in this world and in the Hereafter.

As far as the Hereafter is concerned, God will appreciate the striving of the righteous among them such that they will not see anything that will grieve them, but will ever abide in comfort and honour. As with others, they are off to chastisement and punishment.

As far as this world is concerned, God has promised to make the righteous among them inheritors of the earth and to give them the good end of this abode. As for the wicked ones, they are destined to doom, obliteration, destruction and loss of their efforts.

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Commentary

إِنَّ هَٰذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٩٢﴾

(21:92) ***Surely this*** **(hādhihi)** ***is your nation*** **(ummatukum)*****, one nation (only), and I am your Lord; therefore, serve Me.***

An *ummah* is a group united by a single purpose and destination. The context shows that the verse is addressed universally to all accountable humans. "Nation" means the human species, which is a single species [that includes all individuals]. The demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhihi*) is feminine because the predicate is feminine [that is, *wāḥidah*, "one"].

The meaning is: O people, you belong to this nation of the human species, which is a single nation, and I—that is, God—am your Lord, for I am your Owner and the Director of your affairs. Hence, serve Me and no one else.

One nation (only) involves a proof for the command to serve God. The proof is: The human species—as a single species and nation with a single purpose which is to achieve a happy human life—can have only one Lord. This is because lordship or divinity is not a conventional and honorific position such that humans can choose what, how many, and what kind of gods and lords they want. On the contrary, lordship is an existential position of regulating human affairs in the world of creation. Humankind is a single special reality (*ḥaqīqat al-nawʿiyyah*); the system in operation that regulates its affairs is a single system, the parts of which are connected and linked to each other; and a single regulatory system is only ever operated by a single regulator. Hence, it makes no sense for human beings to disagree over the matter of lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), where some of them adopt a lord that is different from the lord of others, and some of them pursue a course of devotion that is distinct from the path of others. Since humans are a single species, they must adopt a single lord which is the real possessor of lordship. That is God, Mighty is His Name.

Some exegetes have suggested that *ummah* means religion, and the demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhihi*) refers to the religion of Islam [in the general sense] which was the religion of all the prophets. What is meant by its unity is that all the prophets are gathered around it, or rather they agree on it. The meaning would be: The religion of submission to God (*islām*) is your nation, the borders of which you must guard. It is the nation agreed upon by all the prophets.

This, however, is an unlikely interpretation. Referring to religion as *ummah* is permissible only in a metaphorical sense, and there must be some evidence to choose a metaphorical interpretation over a literal one. There is no reason to divert a term from its apparent meaning when it is correct, robust, and supported by the rest of His words. For example He says: *And people are naught but a single nation, but then they disagreed* (10:19), which, as you can see, summarizes what is mentioned in the current verse and the verse that follows [21:92-93]. Furthermore, the above interpretation does not explain the use of *rabb* (lord) instead of *ilāh* (god) in, *and I am your Lord.* On the other hand, if *ummah* is interpreted as group or community, then it would mean: Verily you are a single species and I am the Owner and Regulator of your affairs [that is, I am your *rabb*], so serve Me and adopt Me as your god (*ilāh*).

There are other explanations offered by the exegetes for the verse which are all far from the context. We have eschewed quoting them, but whoever is interested should consult the lengthy books of *tafsīr*.

وَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ كُلٌّ إِلَيْنَا رَاجِعُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

(21:93) ***And they broke*** **(taqaṭṭaʿū)** ***their religion (into sects) between them: to Us shall all come back.***

Three meanings have been suggested for the word *taqaṭṭuʿ*:

(1) According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *taqaṭṭuʿ* means *taqṭīʿ*, which is "to divide, break, and cut."

(2) According to others, it has its apparent meaning, which is "to deviate, differ, and disagree (that is, to *become* divided)." In this case, *amrahum* (lit. "their affair" but translated as "their religion") is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection because of the omission of the preposition (*ḥarf al-jarr*). The implied meaning is: *taqaṭṭaʿū fī amrihim* (they became divided in their affair).[1]

(3) Others have suggested that *taqaṭṭaʿū* incorporates a sense of *jaʿl* (making, placement). That is why it is transitive without a preposition.[2]

Whatever the case may be, breaking their affair and dividing their

1 This is called *nazʿ al-khāfiḍ* (omission of a preposition), where in this case the particle *fī* (lit. "in") has been omitted. (Trans.)

2 In other words, there is no implied omitted preposition to justify *amrahum* as the object of *taqaṭṭaʿū*. (Trans.)

religion among themselves is a metaphorical expression. It means that they turned this single and unified matter—that is, the religion of monotheism which is called to via prophethood—into broken pieces which they divided among themselves, each of them taking something and leaving the rest. Thus has been the case of the idolaters, the Jews, the Christians, the Zoroastrians and the Sabeans with their various sects. This is a kind of rebuke of the people, and criticism of their disagreement over religion and their forsaking the divine command to worship Him alone.

… to Us shall all come back: This clarifies that their disagreement over the matter of religion will not be left unattended and without consequence. Rather, they will all return to God and be requited according to their different ways, as elaborated in His subsequent words: *Therefore whoever shall do good deeds…* (21:94).

This sentence—*to Us shall all come back*—is not connected by a conjunction to the previous part because it is an answer to an implied question. It is as if one has asked: "Where will their disagreement over the matter of religion end, and what will be the result of it?" Thus the verse answers: "To Us shall all come back, and We shall requite them for what they have done."

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَا كُفْرَانَ لِسَعْيِهِ وَإِنَّا لَهُ كَاتِبُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

(21:94) ***Therefore whoever shall do good deeds and he is a believer, there shall be no denying of his exertion, and surely We will write (it) down for him.***

This discusses those who have disagreed [in the matter of religion] in terms of their retribution in the Hereafter. Their worldly retribution is coming up where He says: *And certainly We wrote in the Psalms after the reminder that (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it.* (21:105)

Therefore whoever shall do good deeds **(min al-ṣāliḥāt)*:*** This means "whoever does *some* good deeds…" Doing some good deeds is then qualified by belief, as He says: *and he is a believer*. This shows that doing good without belief is futile.

Given the context and especially the previous verse—*and I am your Lord; therefore, serve Me* (21:92)—belief here certainly means belief in God. However, belief in God is inseparable from belief in all of His prophets without exception, as per His words: *Surely those who disbelieve*

in Allah and His messengers and (those who) desire to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others…these it is that are truly unbelievers (4:150-151).

… there shall be no denying* (kufrāna) *of his exertion: That is: His goods deeds will not be covered, where *kufrān* is the opposite of gratitude (*shukr*), as the same idea is mentioned elsewhere as follows: *And your exertion shall be thanked* (76:22).

… and surely We will write (it) down for him: That is: "We will write it in the scrolls of deeds, a writing that shall not be forgotten." Thus, *there shall be no denying of his exertion, and surely We will write (it) down for him* means that his good deed will neither be forgotten nor left unappreciated.

This is one of the verses which indicate that the acceptance of good deeds is conditional upon belief, which is confirmed by verses that indicate the futility of [good] deeds with disbelief. It also indicates that a believer who does *some* good deeds is among those who will be saved.

وَحَرَامٌ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَنَّهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٩٥﴾

(21:95) ***And there is a ban on any town which We destroy that they shall not return.***

The primary meaning that springs to the mind from this verse given its context is that the people of a town that is destroyed will not return to the world a second time to be blessed with life again and to make up for the good deeds that they missed. This, in fact, corresponds to a group on the other side of the division, opposite to those whom were discussed in the previous verse: *Therefore whoever shall do good deeds and he is a believer…* (21:94). Thus, by contrast, the opposite group corresponds to those who were not believers with some good deeds. As a result, they have no good deed recorded for them, nor any exertion to be appreciated. They are disappointed losers whose exertions were wasted in this world, and who have no possibility of a second life in the world to recover what they missed.

The difference is that here God describes the society instead of the individual, because He says "any town" instead of "anyone" in: *And there is a ban on any town which We destroy*. An individual's corruption may naturally spread to the society and ultimately lead to their rebellion. That is when they qualify for [God's] word of punishment, and are thus destroyed, as He says: *And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the Day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement* (17:58).

A remote possibility is that destruction here means destruction through sins in the sense of losing the potential for felicity and guidance, as in His words: *and they only bring destruction upon their own souls while they do not perceive* (6:26). If so, then the verse would be equivalent to the verse: *yet surely Allah does not guide one who leads astray* (16:37). The meaning would be: There is a ban that prevents from repentance and uprightness on any town which We have destroyed in the sense of decreeing error for them due to their sins.

The meaning of the verse [either way] is: It is impossible for a town—which did not do good deeds with belief and which ends up in destruction—to return and compensate what they missed—in terms of efforts that will be appreciated, and good deeds that will be recorded and accepted.

… that they shall not return: It would have been expected for it to say, "There is a ban that they should return," but the verse says, "that they should *not* return." This [additional negation] is a rational metaphor where the net *outcome* of the prohibition—indicated by "there is a ban"—is mentioned instead of the *object* of the prohibition. In this case, the prohibition is against "returning" and the net outcome would be that "they shall not return;" thus the verse is saying, "it is prohibited for them that they shall not return." This literary technique shows a sense of the fait accompli; as if by the mere ban of their return, their non-return is established immediately.

A similar case is seen in His words [where God addresses Satan]: *He said: What hindered you* (manaʿaka) *so that you did not make obeisance* (an lā tasjuda) *when I commanded you?* (7:12). The result of being hindered from obeisance is non-obeisance. Then this non-obeisance—which is the *result* of hindrance—is mentioned as the *object* of hindrance.[1]

Another example is the verse: *Say: Come; I will recite what your Lord has forbidden* (ḥarrama) *to you—that you do not associate* (an lā tushrikū) *anything with Him* (6:151). The forbiddance of associating partners with God results in "not associating anything with Him." The verse mentions this result as what has been forbidden instead of the association itself. We also explained these two verses [7:12 and 6:151] in a different way previously [in our exposition of the two verses].

Exegetes have suggested other interpretations for the verse, including:

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1 In this case, such usage shows the strength and effectiveness of the factor—that is, arrogance—which hindered Satan from obeisance. (Trans.)

(1) The negative particle *lā* ("not" in "*shall not return*") is extra. What is really meant is "that they shall return" (*annahum yarjiʿūna*).

(2) *Ḥarām* (banned, forbidden, unlawful) sometimes means *wājib* (incumbent, obligatory). They have drawn on the following poem by al-Khansāʾ as evidence for this meaning:

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It is incumbent (*ḥarām*) on me that I should cry
For Ṣakhr[1] whenever I see another guy
Over a dear one weeping with sigh.

(3) The object of the ban is omitted, and what is implied is: There is a ban on the acceptance of deeds from a town which We destroy due to their sins—that is, which We find to be doomed because of their sins—because they do not return to repentance.

(4) "Not returning" means not returning to God through resurrection, as opposed to not returning to this world again. Therefore, maintaining the literal meaning of the words, it means: And it is impossible for a town, the people of which We have destroyed on account of their rebellion, not to return to Us to be punished.

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The reader would surely realize the weakness of all of these explanations.

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُتِحَتْ يَأْجُوجُ وَمَأْجُوجُ وَهُمْ مِنْ كُلِّ حَدَبٍ يَنْسِلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

(21:96) ***Until when Gog and Magog are let loose*** **(futiḥat)** ***and they shall break forth*** **(yansilūna, from nusūl)** ***from every elevated place*** **(ḥadabin).**

Ḥadab means "an elevated land in the middle of lowlands." *Nusūl* means "exiting quickly," as it is used in *nislān al-dhiʾb* (the wolf's breaking forth). The context dictates that "Until when…" marks the end point of the elaboration of the two groups discussed in the last two verses: *Therefore whoever shall do good deeds…* (21:94-95). The plural pronoun "they" refers to Gog and Magog.

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The meaning is: The affair will continue to follow this course—where We record the good deeds of the believers and appreciate their exertions, and We destroy the iniquitous towns and ban their return once they

1 In some versions the name is ʿAmrw. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, under *ḥ-r-m*. (Trans.)

are destroyed—until the time when Gog and Magog are *futiḥat*. *Futiḥat* means "to be opened," and here the "opening of Gog and Magog" means the opening of the barrier that was blocking their way. Thus, Gog and Magog will rush down toward the rest of the people from the highlands, and this is one of the conditions of the Hour and one of the signs of the Resurrection, as God has mentioned where He says: *But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it level with the ground, and the promise of my Lord is ever true. And on that day We will leave a part of them in conflict with another part, and the trumpet will be blown, so We will gather them all together* (18:98-99). We sufficiently addressed the topic of Gog and Magog and the barrier raised against them in the exposition of Sūrah al-Kahf [under the cited verses].

One exegete has suggested that the plural pronoun "they" refers to the people, and what is meant is the people's exit from their graves to the land of Resurrection.

The problem with this interpretation is that it neither complies with what is mentioned before it—*Until when Gog and Magog are let loose…*—nor with what comes after—*And the true promise shall draw nigh* (21:97). Moreover this very sentence—that is, "*and they shall break forth…*"—serves as a *ḥāl*, meaning that it describes the state of the subject in the previous part (that is, it describes the condition of Gog and Magog in: *Until when Gog and Magog are let loose*). This also does not comply with the pronoun referring to the people.[1] Furthermore, the sentence talks about breaking forth from every "elevated place," and that does not apply to coming out of "graves." That is why the proponent of the above interpretation—Mujāhid—read the word as *jadath* which means grave.[2]

وَاقْتَرَبَ الْوَعْدُ الْحَقُّ فَإِذَا هِيَ شَاخِصَةٌ أَبْصَارُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا قَدْ كُنَّا فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ هَٰذَا بَلْ كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

1 When the conjunction "and" (*wāw*) is followed by a pronoun (like "they" in this case) it means "while" and it is called *wāw ḥāliyyah*. What is meant here is: "Until when Gog and Magog are let loose *while* they shall break forth…" This shows that the subject in the second part of the verse should be the same as the subject in the first part. (Trans.)

2 Note that *jadath* (grave) and *ḥadab* (highland) differ only in the dots on the letters. Not including dots in writing was rather common in the past, which could justify different readings. (Trans.)

(21:97) ***And the true promise shall draw nigh, then lo! The eyes of those who disbelieved shall be fixedly open*** **(shākhiṣah, from shukhūṣ)*****: O woe to us! Surely we were in a state of heedlessness as to this; nay, we were unjust.***

"The true promise" means the Hour [that is, the Resurrection]. *Shukhūṣ* of eyes means "to look without blinking," according to al-Rāghib. It is concomitant to the person's full attention and concern toward what he is looking at, such that he is not distracted by anything else. It is usually during a sudden evil event.

… O woe to us! Surely we were in a state of heedlessness as to this; nay, we were unjust: This is a narration of what the unbelievers will say when they suddenly witness the Hour. They will cry "Woe be upon us!" claiming that they had been heedless of what they now see, as if they had been deceived into total heedlessness by someone else. However, they will then move on to acknowledge that their heedlessness in fact stemmed from their unjustness: they occupied themselves with worldly affairs that make one forget and become heedless of the Hereafter. This is expressed by their words: *nay, we were unjust* (21:97).

إِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ حَصَبُ جَهَنَّمَ أَنْتُمْ لَهَا وَارِدُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾

(21:98) ***Surely you and what*** **(mā)** ***you worship besides Allah are the fuel*** **(ḥaṣabu)** ***of Hell; to it you shall come.***

Ḥaṣab means "fuel." Some have defined it as *ḥaṭab* (firewood). Others have said that etymologically it is "that which is thrown into fire," which would apply to both.

God usually refers to the idols in His Book by words that are used for intelligent beings, as seen in His subsequent statement: *they would not have come to it* (21:99).[1] However, here He uses the particle *mā* (lit. "what") instead of the particle *man* (lit. "who, whom"). The verse says "*what you worship*" instead of "whom you worship." As the exegetes have pointed

1 "Coming to something" (*waradūhā* in verse 21:99) is a voluntary act by an intelligent being. Besides what the author's explanation here, another possible explanation for verse 21:99 is that the idolaters and their idols are all referred to by the same pronoun "they" (imbedded in *waradūhā*), which involves the inclusion of the idols with the idolaters as intelligent beings. The same two points can be said about the last part of this very verse: *to it you shall come*, where an act of intelligent beings is ascribed to both the idolaters and their idols, both included in the same plural pronoun. (Trans.)

out, this expression is meant to include only the idols and images which they used to worship, not other objects of worship such as prophets, saints and angels. This exclusion is confirmed by His subsequent words: *Surely (as for) those* (alladhīna) *for whom the good has already gone forth from Us…* (21:101).[1]

Apparently the address in these verses is directed to the unbelievers on the Day of Resurrection [not to the unbelievers in this world]. The verses describe what the unbelievers will be told on that day: they will be sentenced to enter the Hellfire and abide therein forever. The address is not directed at the unbelievers in this world, informing them about what will happen to them in the Hereafter as a means of refuting polytheism and idolatry.

***… to it* (lahā) *you shall come* (wāridūna):** The verb *warada* is transitive without a preposition.[2] Therefore, the letter *lām* in *lahā* serves to emphasize this transitivity [that is, "you shall *certainly* come by Hell and stand by it"]. It could also mean *ilā* (lit. "to") [as translated here]. Given the context, the address is apparently directed to both the unbelievers and their gods. That is, you and your gods shall come *by* Hell, or shall come *to* it.

لَوْ كَانَ هَٰؤُلَاءِ آلِهَةً مَا وَرَدُوهَا ۖ وَكُلٌّ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

(21:99) ***Had these been gods, they would not have come to it, and all shall abide therein forever.***

This builds on the previous verse and shows the reality of the gods which they used to worship so that they would intercede for them.

… all shall abide therein forever: that is, every one of you and your gods.

لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

(21:100) ***For them therein shall be groaning* (zafīr) *and therein they shall not hear.***

Zafīr is "the sound of inhaling air." That is why it has been interpreted as "braying of donkeys." Their lack of hearing is their punishment for not

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1 The demonstrative pronoun "those" (*alladhīna*) is specifically used for intelligent beings. (Trans.)

2 *Warada* itself means to "come to the brink of something," as used in this meaning and without a preposition in verse 28:23. (Trans.)

listening to the word of truth in this world, just as their lack of vision is their punishment for turning away from reflecting on God's signs in this world.[1]

This verse involves a switch from addressing the unbelievers to addressing the Prophet. This turning away from addressing them is to show to others the dismal conditions that they face. Based on this, the plural pronouns here refer to the unbelievers alone, not both to them and their gods.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ سَبَقَتْ لَهُمْ مِنَّا الْحُسْنَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ عَنْهَا مُبْعَدُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

(21:101) ***Surely (as for) those for whom the good*** **(al-ḥusnā)** ***has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it.***

Ḥusnā is the feminine form of *aḥsan* (better, best). It is an adjective taking the place of the noun that it describes. It implies "the best *promise*," and that is the promise of deliverance, or heaven. Both promises appear in His words: *And We will deliver the Allah-fearing and We will leave the unjust therein on their knees* (19:72), and: *Allah has promised to the believing men and the believing women gardens* (9:72).

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ حَسِيسَهَا ۖ وَهُمْ فِي مَا اشْتَهَتْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ لَا يَحْزُنُهُمُ الْفَزَعُ الْأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ هَٰذَا يَوْمُكُمُ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(21:102-103) ***They will not hear its faintest sound*** **(ḥasīsahā)**, ***and they shall abide in that which their souls long for. The great fearful event*** **(al-fazaʿ al-akbar)** ***shall not grieve them, and the angels shall meet them: This is your day which you were promised.***

Ḥasīs is "a sound which can be sensed." *Al-fazaʿ al-akbar* means "the greatest terror." God has mentioned its occurrence upon the blow of the Trumpet: *And on the day when the trumpet shall be blown, then those who are in the heavens and those who are in the earth shall be terrified* (27:87).

… And the angels shall meet them: the angels will meet them with glad tidings, which is their saying: *This is your day which you were promised.*

يَوْمَ نَطْوِي السَّمَاءَ كَطَيِّ السِّجِلِّ لِلْكُتُبِ ۚ كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ ۚ وَعْدًا

1 This clarifies the apparent contradiction in the verse: they will hear the painful sounds of groaning of Hellfire, but they will not hear anything pleasant or promising. (Trans.)

عَلَيْنَآ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا فَٰعِلِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

(21:104) ***On the day when We will roll up*** **(naṭwī, from ṭayy)** ***heaven like the rolling up of the scroll*** **(al-sijill)** ***for writings*** **(lil-kutub),** ***as*** **(kamā)** ***We originated the first creation, (so) We shall return it; a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about.***

Al-Mufradāt says:

> It is said that people used to write on certain rocks called *sijill*. Thereafter, anything that was written on was called a *sijill*. He says: *like the rolling up of the scroll* (al-sijill) *for writing* (21:104). It [the heaven] will be rolled up like a piece of writing that is rolled up as a means of protection.

This is the clearest and simplest interpretation given for the term.

Based on the above meaning, "writings" (*al-kutub*) is the object of "rolling up" (*ṭayy*), and "the scroll" (*al-sijill*) is its subject.

The "scroll" is a sheet that includes some writings. "Writings" are words or ideas that have some share of existence and subsistence in the scroll through the lines and inscriptions on it. When the scroll is rolled up, the writings are also rolled up with it. As a result, the writings disappear, where neither they nor any sign or trace of them will be visible. The verse is saying that the heavens are rolled up by divine power in like manner, as per His words: *and the heavens rolled up in His right hand* (39:67). As a result, they become hidden from everyone else, and neither the heavens nor any trace of them will be visible. Of course, they will not disappear from the world of the unseen even though they disappear from elsewhere, just as the writing does not disappear from the scroll even though it may be hidden from others.

Based on this explanation, the "rolling up of the heavens" means their returning to the treasure troves of the unseen after being sent down from it in known measure. He says: *And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it, and We do not send it down but in a known measure* (15:21). He also says in an absolute sense: *and to Allah is the eventual coming* (3:28), and: *Surely to your Lord is the return* (96:8).

Perhaps it is in this sense that "*as We originated the first creation, We shall return it*" has been interpreted as the return of everything to how it was before its creation, where everything was in a state of being nothing worthy of mention. He says: *and indeed I created you before, when you*

were nothing (19:9), and: *There surely came over man a period of time when he was a thing not worth mentioning* (76:1).

This interpretation matches what has been narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, that "the verse means: everything will perish, just as it was at the beginning." This meaning is plausible as it explains the previous part of the verse—*On the day when We roll up heaven…*—but the previous verses were predominantly about "return" in the sense of things *coming back* [to existence] after their annihilation, not "return" in the sense of their annihilation and going back to their initial state before coming to existence.

Hence, the apparent meaning based on the context of the verses is: "We will resurrect creation just as We originated it." This means that the letter *kāf* in *kamā* (lit. "as") is to liken; the particle *mā* serves to render the following verb into an infinitive;[1] and "*the first creation*" is the object of "*We originated*." It means: Verily We will bring the creation back, and that will not be difficult for Us, but it will be as easy for us as its origination.

… a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about: That is: We have made this a binding promise which shall be incumbent upon Us to fulfil. Surely We will bring about what We have promised, as per Our custom.

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وَلَقَدْ كَتَبْنَا فِي الزَّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

(21:105) ***And certainly We wrote in the Zabūr after the reminder that (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it.***

Apparently *Zabūr* (Psalms) refers to David's scripture, as it is identified in the verse: *And We gave Zabūr to David* (4:163; 17:55). Other suggested interpretations for it are:

(i) the Qur'an;

(ii) any scripture revealed to the prophets, in an unconditional sense;

(iii) any scripture revealed to the prophets after Moses.

However, there is no evidence for any of these.

"The reminder" means the Torah. God has given it this name in two places in the current chapter: *so ask the followers of the reminder if you do not know* (21:7), and: *and a reminder for to those who would guard (against evil)* (21:48).

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1 Therefore *kamā badaʾnā* means "just like Our origination [of creation]." (Trans.)

Some have interpreted it as the Qur'an, which God has called a reminder in various places in His Book. Based on this opinion, the Psalms being "*after the reminder*" is according to their hierarchical as opposed to chronological order. Others have said that "the reminder" means the Guarded Tablet. The weakness of these interpretations is clear.

… that (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it* (yarithuhā, from wirāthah and irth)*: According to al-Rāghib, *wirāthah* and *irth* mean "the transfer of property to someone without involving a transaction."

To "inherit the earth" means the transfer of control over its benefits and the blessings of life to them. These blessings could be either worldly or otherworldly. Worldly blessings are those that pertain to life in this world, such as the rightful enjoyment of its resources and pleasures. The verse would thus mean that the earth will be cleansed of polytheism and disobedience, and will be inhabited by a righteous human society which worships God without associating any partners with Him. God refers to this in the verse: *Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth…they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me…* (24:55).

Otherworldly blessings—that is, blessings pertaining to the Hereafter—are stations of nearness [to God] which they acquire during their life in this world. This eternal bliss and comfort is a blessing that stems from their worldly life, as He narrates from the inhabitants of Paradise: *And they shall say: (All) praise is due to Allah, Who has made good to us His promise, and He has made us inherit the land; we may abide in the garden where we please* (39:74), and as He says: *These are they who are the heirs, who shall inherit the Paradise* (23:10-11).

The above explanation shows that the verse is meant in an unconditional sense, and there is no need to restrict it to one kind of inheritance as some exegetes have done. Some have restricted it to inheritance in the Hereafter and have quoted relevant verses as evidence. One of their arguments is that the verse is joined by "and" to the previous verse which was about the return to life [in the Hereafter], while there will be no earth after the return so that the righteous may inherit it. The answer to this is: It is not certain that the verse is joined with the conjunction to the preceding one. It could be that it is joined to an earlier verse—*Therefore, whoever shall do good deeds…* (21:94)—as we shall explain below.

Others have restricted the verse to worldly inheritance. They construe it as the time when Islam will prevail or when the Mahdi will appear, which the Prophet has said in *mutawātir* (repeatedly reported, mass-transmitted) narrations reported by both Shias and Sunnis. They have cited relevant verses to this meaning to prove their point, some of which we cited above.

In short, the verse is absolute and applies to both kinds of inheritance. Meanwhile, the thread and tone of the verses suggest that it is joined with a conjunction to His earlier words: *Therefore whoever shall do good deeds and he is a believer…* (21:94ff). Those verses [21:94-95] explained the case of two opposite groups in terms of their reward in the *Hereafter*. Thus, this verse complements that by explaining how the two groups differ in terms of their reward in *this world*. The effective meaning is: Surely We commanded them [to follow] a single religion, but they divided and disagreed with one another, and so Our reward for them shall be different. As for the Hereafter, the believers' effort will be appreciated and their work will be recorded, while the unbelievers will have the opposite of that. And as for this world, the righteous will inherit the earth, unlike the others.

إِنَّ فِي هَٰذَا لَبَلَاغًا لِّقَوْمٍ عَابِدِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

(21:106) ***Most surely in this*** **(hādhā)** ***is a message*** **(la-balāghan)** ***to a people who serve.***

There are three possible meanings for *balāgh*: (1) sufficiency (*kifāyah*); (2) the means of reaching a goal or objective; (3) reaching per se. The verse makes sense based on any of the three meanings. The demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādha*) refers to the content and teachings of the chapter.

It means: Verily in what We have explained in the chapter—that the Lord is One, besides whom there is no other lord; that He should be served through prophethood, which prepares one for the Day of Reckoning; and that the reward of the believers is such and such, while the reward of the unbelievers is such and such—there is sufficiency for people who [wish to] serve [God]. If they adopt and follow it, it will suffice them and they will reach their goal.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(21:107) ***And We have not sent you but as a mercy to everyone*** **(al-ʿālamīn).**

That is: You are a mercy sent to all human communities. Since the

word *al-ʿālamīn* is in the plural form and also preceded with the article *al*, it indicates the universality of the Prophet's messengership.

He is a mercy to the people of the world because he has brought a religion that if the people of the world adopt it, they will reach both worldly and otherworldly happiness.

He is also a mercy to the people of the world in terms of the good effects which spread from his rising with the call of truth in their societies. This can be evidently seen by comparing the general state of human life today with its state before the Prophet's mission.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ ۖ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٨﴾

(21:108) ***Say: It is only*** **(innamā)** ***revealed to me that your Allah is only*** **(annamā)** ***one Allah; will you then submit?***

That is: The religion that has been revealed to me is nothing but monotheism. Whether it is belief or religious rulings, it is either an implication of monotheism or it boils down to it and can be traced back to it. The proof of this interpretation is the emphasized exclusivity in the verse by repeating "only" twice, which suggests a real exclusivity [as opposed to a relative exclusivity].

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُلْ آذَنْتُكُمْ عَلَىٰ سَوَاءٍ ۖ وَإِنْ أَدْرِي أَقَرِيبٌ أَمْ بَعِيدٌ مَا تُوعَدُونَ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(21:109-110) ***But if they turn back, say: I have given you a warning*** **(ādhantukum, from īdhān)** ***in fairness*** **(ʿalā sawāʾ)***, and I do not know whether what you are threatened with is near or far: Surely He knows what is spoken openly and He knows what you hide.***

It is said that *īdhān* is from the root *idhn* (permission), in the transitive form *ifʿāl*. *Idhn* originally means "knowing about the permissibility and possibility of something," but it is used metaphorically to refer to "any kind of knowledge." Thus its transitive form *īdhān* is derived from it (meaning "to inform, to make known"). The term is often used to convey a sense of caution and warning.

ʿAlā sawāʾ (in fairness, equally) apparently describes the state of the object of *ādhantukum* (that is, "you" in "*I have given you warning*"). The meaning is: "If they turn away from your call and turn away from submitting to God through monotheism, then tell them: I let you know that you are in danger of it [that is, of your aversion] because you are equally warned, or because you are equally in danger." Some have said

that it means: "I warned you of war," but this is an unlikely meaning in a Meccan chapter.

… and I do not know whether what you are threatened with is near or far: Surely He knows what is spoken openly and He knows what you hide: This is a continuation of what the Prophet was commanded to say. *What you are threatened with* refers to the threat of punishment which is implied by *I have given you warning in fairness* (21:109). Therefore, these verses order the Prophet to two things: (1) to inform them of the risk and threat which they would face in case they turned away from Islam (or submission); and (2) to deny knowledge of the nearness or remoteness of its occurrence. This is justified by restricting knowledge of what they say out loud—that is, their open criticism and mockery of Islam—and what they hide to God. He knows the truth of the matter.

Given the above, it can be inferred that God's punishment is targeting them because of both their open sneering and their hidden plots against Islam. It is as if to say: They deserve punishment for openly speaking ill about this divine call, and secretly scheming against it, so threaten them with it. However, since you do not have comprehensive knowledge of their open speech and their secret schemes, you do not know how much punishment their crime warrants in terms of proximity or remoteness of its occurrence. So deny knowledge of its specific time from yourself, and defer such knowledge to God alone.

Thus we can deduce that *what is spoken openly* means what the polytheists openly said about Islam in mocking and derision, and *what you hide* means their hidden plots and schemes against it.

وَإِنْ أَدْرِى لَعَلَّهُ فِتْنَةٌ لَكُمْ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿١١١﴾

(21:111) ***And I do not know if this may be a trial for you and a provision till a time.***

This is a continuation of what the Prophet was commanded to say. The pronoun "this" in "this may be" (*laʿallahu*) is said to indirectly refer to something that is not mentioned. Perhaps it refers to the warning that he was commanded to give. The meaning would be: I do not know, perhaps this warning that I was commanded to give—that is, God's intent in commanding me to inform you of danger—is a test, so that you may expose what you really think with regard to the matter of my call. In other words, this is how He wants to test you by letting you enjoy yourselves

for a while until an appointed time, as a way of giving you respite (*imhāl*) and/or leading you step-by-step [to temptation and perdition] (*istidrāj*).[1]

قَالَ رَبِّ احْكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَرَبُّنَا الرَّحْمَٰنُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

(21:112) ***He said: O my Lord! Judge Thou with truth; and our Lord is the Beneficent, Whose help is sought against what you ascribe (to Him).***

The pronoun "he" in *He said* refers to the Prophet. The verse relates his words calling them to the truth, and their rejection and turning away from him in response. It is as if when he called them and communicated to them what he had been commanded to convey to them, they insistently and vehemently denied him. Thus he left them on their own and turned to his Lord saying: *O my Lord! Judge Thou with truth*… "With truth" is an interpretive or explanatory qualification (*tawḍīḥī*) for God's judgment, not a restrictive or confining one (*iḥtirāzī*), because His judgment is only ever with truth. It is as if to say: "O my Lord! Judge with the true judgment of Yours." It means, manifest the truth in favor of a certain group [that is, the followers of truth] and against a certain group [that is, its opponents].

… and our Lord is the Beneficent, Whose help is sought against what you ascribe (to Him): Here the Prophet turns again to them [the polytheists] and addresses them. It is as if he is explaining why he forsook them, turned to God, and asked Him to judge with truth. The reason is that He is the Lord of both him and them, and thus it is up to Him to settle the disputes between His subjects and bondsmen. Furthermore, since He is the Beneficent, He does not turn down one who turns to Him in petition. He it is the One Who judges, and Whose rule no one can defer. He establishes the truth and eradicates falsehood though His words.

Therefore, the Prophet's prayer, *O my Lord! Judge Thou with truth* is itself an example of turning to Him Who is his and their Lord, asking Him by His mercy to judge with truth, and seeking His help against the falsehood that they ascribe to Him. Their false ascriptions included describing their religion by virtues that it lacked, and ascribing to the religion of truth vices that it was free of.

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1 Giving respite is for one to actualize one's potentials, repent from error, and find rectitude. *Istidrāj* is a subtle form of punishment and God's hidden plot against those who deny His signs and communications, where He gives them time and enjoyment whereby they feel secure of God's punishment and add to their iniquity. See verses 7:182-183 and 68:44-45. (Trans.)

Our exposition above should clarify a few points about the wording and language of the verse. Some of these points are:

(i) the shift from second person to third person in *He said*;

(ii) referring to God first as *my Lord* and later as *our Lord*; and

(iii) describing Him as *the Beneficent* and *Whose help is sought*.

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 21:95 (*And there is a ban on any town which We destroy…*) Imam al-Bāqir said: "[It means:] any town that God destroys by [exterminating] punishment will not return."[1]

(2) Imam al-Bāqir said: When this verse—*Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the fuel of Hell* (21:98)—was revealed, the people of Mecca became extremely distressed. At that point ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Zabaʿrā met them while the unbelievers of Quraysh were immersed in conversation about this verse.

Ibn al-Zabaʿrā asked them, "Did Muḥammad really utter this verse?"

They replied: "Yes."

Ibn al-Zabaʿrā said, "If he acknowledges it, then I will most assuredly have a case against him." So he gathered him and them and then asked: "O Muḥammad, this verse that you just recited, is it exclusively about us and our gods, or does it apply to all nations and their gods?"

He replied: "Indeed it is about you and your gods as well as other nations and their gods except those excluded by God."

Ibn al-Zabaʿrā said: "By God I have got you now! Is it not that you praise Jesus even though you know that the Christians worship Jesus and his mother, and some people worship the angels. So shall they also be in Hell along with the other gods?"

The Messenger of God answered: "No."

Thereupon the Quraysh burst out laughing and said: "Ibn al-Zabaʿrā has defeated you."

God's Messenger said: "That is not true. Did I not say 'except those excluded by God'? That is where He says: *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept*

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

far off from it; They will not hear its faintest sound, and they shall abide in that which their souls long for (21:101-102)."[1]

Author's comment: This account is also narrated via Sunni chains of transmission, but the text of the above account is more robust and acceptable.

(3) The Sunni narration of the above is that Ibn ʿAbbās said: When this verse was revealed—*Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come* (21:98)—it greatly troubled the people of Mecca. They said: "He has vilified the gods."

Ibn al-Zabaʿrā then said: "I will defeat Muḥammad for you. Call him to me." He was called and so he asked: "O Muḥammad! Is this thing exclusively about our gods or is it about anyone worshiped apart from *Allah*?"

He replied: "Rather it is about anyone worshiped apart from *Allah*."

Ibn al-Zabaʿrā said: "I have defeated you by the Lord of this building," meaning the Kaʿbah. "Do you not believe, O Muḥammad, that Jesus was a righteous servant, that Ezra (ʿUzayr) was a righteous servant, and that the angels are righteous?"

He said: "That is true."

He replied: "There you go. Here we have the Christians worshiping Jesus, the Jews worshiping Ezra, and Banū Mulayh [tribe] worshiping the angels." Thereupon, the people of Mecca erupted in joy and cheers.

That is when it was revealed: *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us*—that is, Ezra, Jesus and the angels—*They shall be kept far off from it* (21:101), and also: *And when the son of Mary is adduced as an example, lo! Your people raise a clamor thereat* (43:57).

Author's comment: The problems with the text of this account are:

(i) It refers to Ezra in an incident that occurred at the beginning of the Prophetic mission in Mecca, while Ezra's name is nowhere to be found in any of the Meccan chapters. It is only mentioned in Chapter 9 (Sūrah al-Tawbah) which was one of the last chapters revealed in Medina.

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

(ii) It says that the Jews worship Ezra, while in fact the Jews did not worship Ezra. They only said *Ezra is the son of Allah* (9:30) as an honorific ascription, in the same way that they said: *We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones* (5:18).

(iii) It implies that the verse *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it* (21:101) was revealed after the Prophet's concession that *Surely you and what you worship* (21:98) applies to every object of worship other than God and Ibn al-Zabaʿrā's refutation by referring to Jesus, Ezra and the angels. This is an example of an explanation coming after the time when it is needed, which is more supportive of the accusation [against the Prophet's messengership].

(iv) It says that the verse *And when the son of Mary is adduced as an example…* (43:57) was revealed in this incident, but there is no link whatsoever between the above incident and the import of this verse.

(4) The same goes for another similar account that is commonly narrated in Sunni sources, saying that when Ibn al-Zabaʿrā challenged the Prophet, the Prophet replied to him: "Young man! How ignorant you are of the language of your people, because I said, '*what* you worship' not '*whom* you worship.'"

Author's comment: The problem with this account is the statement attributed to the Prophet, that "*I* said x and did not say y." The Prophet should be set above attributing a Qur'anic verse to himself, saying "*I* said this." Moreover, it is narrated from al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar that this narration is baseless and is not to be found in any of the hadith books either with or without a chain of narration.

(5) There is another version of this account that is similar in weakness to the above: Ibn al-Zabaʿrā said, "Did you say this?" He [the Prophet] replied: "Yes." He said: "I have defeated you, by the Lord of Kaʿbah. Is it not that the Jews worship Ezra, the Christians worship Christ, and Banū Mulayh [tribe] worship the angels?" He answered: "Rather they worship the devils who command them to do so." Then God revealed: *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us…* (21:101).

Author's comment: The problem here is that the argument attributed to the Prophet is more helpful than harmful for Ibn al-Zabaʿrā, because it is equally applicable to the worshiped idols as it applies to Ezra, Jesus

and the angels. The idols are also unaware of being worshiped by their worshipers and not satisfied with being worshiped since they are not intelligent beings. This would make the verse only applicable to the devils and not the idols. However, it is narrated from the Prophet that the verse applies to their gods and that he confirmed their inclusion in the verse.

(6) Another similarly weak account is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās is: This verse—*Surely you and what you worship besides Allah are the fuel of Hell; to it you shall come* (21:98)—was initially revealed but then abrogated by: *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it* (21:101).[1]

Author's comment: The weakness of this interpretation is obvious.[2] If there were anything [in verse 21:101 with respect to verse 21:98], it would be an exception [not an abrogation].

(7) The Prophet said [to Imam ʿAlī] in a hadith: O ʿAli! You and your followers (lit. *shīʿah*) will be at the Pond (*al-ḥawḍ*) [on the Day of Resurrection]. You will give a drink to whomever you like, and you will withhold from whomever you dislike. You will be safe on "the day of the great terror" under the shade of the Throne. The people will be fearful but you will have no fear. The people will be grieved, but you will have no grief. It is about you that this verse was revealed: *Surely (as for) those for whom the good has already gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far off from it* (21:101), and *The great fearful event shall not grieve them, and the angels shall meet them: This is your day which you were promised* (21:103).[3]

Author's comment: The verses being revealed about the Imam and his followers can mean either of two things: (1) they are some specific applications of the verses (called *jary*); or (2) the verses were initially and/or primarily revealed about them [but are not *limited* to them]. There are indeed other groups of believers whom have been identified as applications of these verses—especially the second one [21:103]—in other narrations.

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bazzār.

2 It is obvious because the two verses are in the same chapter following the same thread. It does not make sense for a verse to be revealed and then immediately abrogated, as if the initial revelation was a mistake. (Trans.)

3 Al-Ṣaduq's *Amālī*.

Some examples are: (a) one who recites the Qur'an seeking God's reward and then leads a congregation with it [the Qur'an] seeking God's reward; (b) one who makes the call to prayer (*adhān*) seeking God's reward; (c) a slave who fulfills his duty both to God and to his master.

(8) According to Prophetic narrations, the verse [21:103] applies to: (a) those who love each other for the sake of God; (b) those who set out in the darkness of night [in the way of God]; and (c) the emigrants.[1]

Author's comment: These three groups are mentioned in three Prophetic narrations in *al-Durr al-manthūr*: the first on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ, the second on the authority of Abū Umāmah, and the third on the authority of al-Khūdrī. Many other people have been mentioned in narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt as applications of these verses.

(9) Concerning *like the rolling up of the Sijill* (21:104) ʿAlī said: "That [Sijill] is an angel."[2]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also narrated this on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn ʿAsākir from al-Bāqir.

(10) Concerning verse 21:104 (*On the day when We will roll up heaven like the rolling up of al-Sijill*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "Al-Sijill is the name of an angel who rolls up the scrolls [that is, the heaven]. 'Rolling up' means destroying it, whereby it turns into smoke and the earth into fire."

(11) Imam ʿAlī says in describing the dead: They have exchanged the surface of the earth for its interior, vastness for narrowness, family for loneliness, and light for darkness. They came back to it as they came forth from it: barefoot and naked. They have departed from it with their deeds toward everlasting life and the eternal abode, as He says: *as We originated the first creation, (so) We shall return it; a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about* (21:104).[3]

Author's comment: The Imam's reference to the verse can be matched with both meanings of returning: (i) the return of creation to its original point, and (ii) the resurrection of the dead and their return back to life. The two meanings were discussed above in the exposition of the verse.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥāmid.

3 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

(12) The Prophet said: You will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection barefoot, naked and empty-handed; *as We originated the first creation, (so) We shall return it; a promise (binding on Us); surely We will bring it about* (21:104).[1]

Author's comment: A similar narration is reported in *Nūr al-thaqalayn*, on the authority of al-Dūryastī's book, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, from the Prophet.

(13) Concerning *And certainly We wrote in the Zabūr after the reminder* (21:105) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "All the Books [that is, divine scriptures] are a reminder." Concerning *that (as for) the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it* (21:105) it says: "That is al-Qāʾim [the Mahdi] and his Companions." It also says: "Al-Zabūr (the Psalms) is comprised of forecasts of tribulations (*malāḥim*), praise, glorification, and supplication."

Author's comment: The narrations on the Mahdi, his appearance, and his filling the earth with justice and equity after being filled with injustice and oppression reach the level of *tawātur* (mass-transmission) through both Sunni and Shia chains of narration from the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. Whoever is interested should refer to the relevant Sunni and Shia books.

(14) The Messenger of God said: "I am naught but a mercy given as a gift [by God to His servants]."[2]

End of Chapter. All praise be to God.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

Chapter 22

al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage)

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Verses 1-2

بِسْمِاللَّهِالرَّحْمَنِالرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١﴾ يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمْلٍ حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَارَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ بِسُكَارَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ ﴿٢﴾

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

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(22:1) *O people! Guard against (the punishment from) your Lord; surely the earthquake of the Hour is a grievous thing.*

(22:2) *On the day when you shall see it, every woman giving suck shall leave in confusion what she suckled, and every pregnant woman shall lay down her burden, and you shall see people intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe.*

Introduction

Sūrah al-Ḥajj was revealed in Medina and consists of 78 verses.

This chapter addresses the polytheists about the fundamental beliefs of religion with a tone of warning and threat, much like the chapters that were revealed before the Prophet's migration. It can be inferred from the context that it was revealed when the polytheists still had some power and force. The chapter also addresses the believers about things like prayer, the rituals of hajj, doing good, and permission to wage war (*jihād*). It can be inferred from these verses that the believers had just established their community, were now standing on their feet, and had some men, weapons and fighting prowess.

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This suggests that the chapter was revealed in Medina between the Prophet's migration and the Battle of Badr. Its aim is to explain the fundamental beliefs (*uṣūl*) of Islam in a way that would benefit both the believers and the non-believers, and the religious practices (*furūᶜ*) concisely for the believers. The details of Islamic rulings were not yet prescribed at the time, except for some such as the prayer and the hajj, as seen in this chapter.

The chapter starts by describing the Day of Resurrection and its preceding earthquake which will destroy the earth and bring down the mountains. This is in line with the two main goals of the chapter: (1) to call the polytheists to the fundamental beliefs of Islam through warning them; and (2) to call the believers to religious practices in general by enjoining them to fear God and be conscious of Him.

Commentary

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

(22:1) ***O people! Guard against (the punishment from) your Lord; surely the earthquake*** **(zalzalah)** ***of the Hour is a grievous thing.***

Zalzalah and *zilzāl* both mean "a violent and terrifying movement." The term is likely derived from the root *zalla*, which means "to slip." The repetition of *zal* denotes exaggeration as well as recurrence. This is a common Arabic verb form. Other examples are *dhabdhaba*, derived from *dhabba* (to repel); *damdama* derived from *damma* (to cover); *kabkaba* derived from *kabba* (to fall); *dakdaka* derived from *dakka* (to crumble); and *rafrafa* derived from *raffa* (to spread).

The discourse here addresses all human beings, whether believers or non-believers, male or female, present or absent, and living at the time or in the future. Obviously the primary audience are those who were present at the time of revelation, but by extension it includes all human kind because they are all members of the same species.

The verse commands the people to guard against [the punishment of] their Lord. A non-believer does so by believing, and a believer does so by not contravening God's injunctions in practice. God has justified this command by the graveness of *the earthquake on that Hour*. Therefore, it is a command based on warning.

The quake is mentioned along with the Hour because it is one of the signs and tokens of the Hour. It has been said that *zalzalat al-sāᶜah* means "the intensity, violence and horror of the Hour." However, this

interpretation is unlikely given the definitions of *zalzalah*.

يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمْلٍ حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَارَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ بِسُكَارَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ ﴿٢﴾

(22:2) ***On the day when you shall see it, every woman giving suck* (murḍiʿah)** ***shall leave in confusion (tadhhalu, from dhuhūl) what she suckled, and every pregnant woman shall lay down her burden (ḥamlah), and you shall see people intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe.***

Al-dhuhūl is "to abandon something in fear." According to al-Rāghib, *ḥaml* is "a heavy load that is carried within, like the fetus in the mother's womb," while *ḥiml* is "a heavy load that is carried outwardly, like the load of a camel." According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *ḥaml* is "what is inside the body or atop a tree," while *ḥiml* is "what is carried on the back or on the head."

Al-Kashshāf says:

> One may ask, "Why does the verse say *murḍiʿah* and not *murḍiʿ*?"[1] The answer is that *murḍiʿah* is a woman who is *actually and presently* suckling a baby at the time, with her breast in the mouth of the baby. *Murḍiʿ*, however, is a woman who does this task but is not doing it *right now*. The verse says *murḍiʿah* in order to show the intensity of terror, such that if a woman is in the process of giving suck to her baby, she will take her breast out of the baby's mouth out of fear.

One may also ask, "Why does the verse first say: *you shall see* in plural, but then it says *you shall see* in singular?" The answer is that the first part is about seeing the quake, which will be seen by all people, but the second part is about seeing people intoxicated, which means that each person would see others as if they were intoxicated.

… and you shall see people intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe: The verse first affirms their intoxication, but then it negates it. This shows that on the day of intense fear and confusion, people's intellect will cease to function *not*

1 The former is grammatically feminine and the latter is grammatically masculine, but since there is no male that gives suck, the latter is always used for any female that gives suck, without any need for a feminine alternative. (Trans.)

because of alcohol, but due to the severity of God's chastisement. He says: *Surely His punishment is painful, severe.* (11:102)

Apparently the quake spoken about here is before the first blow of the Trumpet, which God describes as: *And the trumpet shall be blown, so all those that are in the heavens and all those that are on the earth shall swoon, except those whom Allah wills; then it shall be blown again, then lo! They shall stand, waiting.* (39:68)

The current verse [22:2] describes a scene where people are living their normal lives, when all of a sudden they are overtaken by "*the earthquake on that Hour*," which changes their condition as described in the verse. This will certainly be before the blow that will cause all living creatures to die.[1]

It has been said that the scene depicted in this verse is only an illustration of the severity of chastisement [not a real image and forecast]. That is, if one were to observe such a scene [hypothetically], then these things would happen to him. However, this view is not in harmony with the purpose of the verse, which is to warn the people, because there is no point in warning people about an unknown chastisement.

Examining Narrations

(1) ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn said: These verses—*O people! Guard against (the punishment from) your Lord; surely the earthquake of the Hour is a grievous thing…but the chastisement of Allah will be severe*

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1 To complement the author's commentary, one could also reflect upon the following points that refer to the Day of Resurrection: (1) The verses that follow (especially verses 6-7) primarily concern the Day of Resurrection. (2) The term "Hour" (*al-sāʿah*) refers to the Day of Resurrection, and the "quake on that Hour" could refer to the quake that will happen on that day. (3) The violent shaking of the earth is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an when describing the Resurrection (chapter 99). (4) The most frequent usage of the term "day" (*yawm*) in the Qur'an is the Day of Resurrection. (5) Verse 2 does not claim that there will necessarily be women who are giving suck and women who are pregnant. Rather, it says that God's chastisement is so severe that it *could* cause such panic. This idea is confirmed by the subsequent part of the verse: *and you shall see people intoxicated, and they shall not be intoxicated but the chastisement of Allah will be severe* (22:2). (6) The initial universal command to all people—to *guard against (the punishment from) your Lord* (22:1)—complies with a subsequent description of an event that will occur to *all* people, not just to those who happen to be livers before the first Trumpet. (Trans.)

(22:1-2)—were revealed when the Prophet was on a journey. He told his Companions, "Do you know what day that is?"
They replied, "God and His messenger know better."
He said, "That is a day when God will tell Adam, 'Send the shipment of Fire!'[1] He will ask, 'My Lord, what is the shipment of Fire?' He will say, 'Out of every thousand people, 999 shall go to hell and one to Paradise.'"
The Muslims started weeping when they heard this.
Then the Messenger of God said, "Be steadfast and take the straight path. Prophets have always been sent at an age of ignorance [about divine guidance] (*jāhiliyyah*). The inhabitants of Hell are taken from the ignorant. If the number is not reached by them, the rest will be taken from the hypocrites. Among these you are like a dot in the leg of an animal, or a mole in the side of a camel."
Then he added, "Indeed I am hopeful that you will make a quarter of the people of Paradise." When they heard this, the Muslims exclaimed: "*Allāhu akbar* (God is greater)." Then he said, "Indeed I am hopeful that you will make a third of the people of Paradise." The Muslims exclaimed, "*Allāhu akbar*." Then he said, "Indeed I am hopeful that you will make half of the people of Paradise." The Muslims glorified God. The Muslims exclaimed, "*Allāhu akbar*."
ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn added: I am not sure if he also said two-thirds or not.[2]

Author's comment: This tradition is narrated through other chains of transmission as well, frequently on the authority of ʿImrān, Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Abū Mūsā and Anas. These narrations have some differences in the text, but the most reliable is the one that we reported above.

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *you shall see people intoxicated* means that they will be confused, with their intellects lost due to sorrow and fear.

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1 There is an addition in some versions of this narration: *min wuldika*. The meaning would be: "Send those who shall be sent to the Fire from amongst your children." (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Tirmidhī (who has authenticated it), al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), and Ibn Mardawayh, through various chains, on the authority of al-Ḥasan and others.

Verses 3-16

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطَانٍ مَرِيدٍ ﴿٣﴾ كُتِبَ
عَلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ مَنْ تَوَلَّاهُ فَأَنَّهُ يُضِلُّهُ وَيَهْدِيهِ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٤﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنْ
كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ
ثُمَّ مِنْ مُضْغَةٍ مُخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ ۚ وَنُقِرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ
أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ۖ وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُتَوَفَّىٰ
وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ۚ وَتَرَى
الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ
﴿٥﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾ وَأَنَّ
السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٧﴾ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ
يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ ﴿٨﴾ ثَانِيَ عِطْفِهِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ
سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ لَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ ۖ وَنُذِيقُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٩﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا
قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاكَ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٠﴾ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ
حَرْفٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ ۖ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ خَسِرَ
الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١١﴾ يَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُ وَمَا
لَا يَنْفَعُهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ ﴿١٢﴾ يَدْعُو لَمَنْ ضَرُّهُ أَقْرَبُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِ ۚ لَبِئْسَ
الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَبِئْسَ الْعَشِيرُ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٤﴾ مَنْ كَانَ يَظُنُّ أَنْ لَنْ يَنْصُرَهُ
اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ بِسَبَبٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ لْيَقْطَعْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ هَلْ يُذْهِبَنَّ
كَيْدُهُ مَا يَغِيظُ ﴿١٥﴾ وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

(22:3) *And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and follows every rebellious Satan.*

(22:4) *Against him it is decreed (written) that whoever takes him for a friend, he shall lead him astray and lead him to the chastisement of the burning fire.*

(22:5) *O people! If you are in doubt about the raising, then surely We created you from dust, then from a small seed, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, complete in make and incomplete, that We may make clear to you; and We cause what We please to stay in the wombs till an appointed time, then We bring you forth as babies, then that you may attain your maturity; and of you is he who is caused to die, and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything; and you see the land barren, but when We send down water to it, it stirs and swells and brings forth every kind of beautiful herbage.*

(22:6) *This is because Allah is the Truth and because He gives life to the dead and because He has power over all things.*

(22:7) *And because the Hour is coming, there is no doubt about it; and because Allah shall raise those who are in the graves.*

(22:8) *And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and without guidance and without an illuminating book,*

(22:9) *Turning away haughtily that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah; for him is disgrace in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning.*

(22:10) *This is due to what your two hands have sent ahead, and because Allah is not unjust to the servants.*

(22:11) *And among people is he who serves Allah (standing) on the edge, so that if good befalls him he is satisfied therewith, but if a trial afflicts him he turns back headlong; he loses this world as well as the Hereafter; that is a manifest loss.*

(22:12) *He calls upon besides Allah that which does not harm him and that which does not benefit him. That is the great straying.*

(22:13) *He calls upon him whose harm is nearer than his benefit; evil certainly is the guardian and evil certainly is the associate.*

(22:14) *Surely Allah will cause those who believe and do good deeds to*

enter gardens beneath which rivers flow; surely Allah does what He pleases.

(22:15) *Whoever has been thinking that Allah will not assist him in this life and the Hereafter, let him stretch a rope above him, then let him sever(it), then let him see if his struggle will take away what he is enraged at.*

(22:16) *And thus have We revealed it,clear arguments, and because Allah guides whom He intends.*

Introduction

These verses describe three groups of people: (1) those who insist on falsehood and argue against the truth; (2) those who are irresolute with regard to the truth; and (3) the believers in truth. The first two groups are in error and will have an unhappy end, while the believers are guided in this world and will be blessed in the Hereafter.

Commentary

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطَانٍ مَرِيد

(22:3) ***And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and follows*** **(yattabiʿu, from ittibāʿ)** ***every rebellious devil*** **(shayṭānin marīd).**

Marīd means "wicked." It has also been interpreted as "one who is absolutely corrupt and devoid of good." "Disputing about God without knowledge"means talking about matters that pertain to His attributes and actions out of ignorance and insisting on it.

… and follows **(yattabiʿu, from ittibāʿ)** ***every rebellious devil:*** This sentence describes the person's beliefs and actions after the first part of the verse which describes the person's speech. It is like saying: that person talks about God without knowledge, insists on ignorance, and holds false belief and acts upon it. Such a person is effectively following Satan (the Devil) in all his beliefs and actions because it is the Satan who leads people to falsehood and error. Using the term "follow" (*ittibāʿ*) refers to the process and approach through which he has reached his beliefs and actions. It also sets the stage for the next verse which says that such a person is astray from the path to Paradise, and is heading for the chastisement of the burning fire.

God says, *every rebellious devil* and not *the rebellious Devil,* which would be Iblīs (Satan). This is to show Satan's numerous ways of deception and misguidance, because there are various gateways to error, each of which is controlled by a devil from the tribe and progeny of Iblīs. There are also devils among humankind who call to error, and who are followed by their misguided followers. Nevertheless, all evil whispers and forms of deception are rooted in Iblīs (may God curse him).

This sentence—*follows every rebellious devil*—also refers to the idea that such a person *continuously* follows falsehood, and that there is *no limit* to his error.[1] This is because his heart has been sealed by error and he has lost his capacity to embrace the truth. It is similar to the verse: *If they see the way of rectitude, they do not take it for a way; and if they see the way of error, they take it for a way.* (7:146)

كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ مَنْ تَوَلَّاهُ فَأَنَّهُ يُضِلُّهُ وَيَهْدِيهِ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٤﴾

(22:4) ***Against him it is decreed*** **(kutiba ʿalayhi)** ***that whoever takes him for a guardian*** **(tawallāhu)*, he shall lead him astray and lead him to the chastisement of the burning fire.***

Tawallā means "to take and follow someone as a master and guardian." The second half of the verse (*he shall lead him astray*) is a subject whose predicate is omitted. The implied meaning is: "He follows every rebellious devil. However, it is written against him [the devil] that whoever takes him for a master and follows him, then his misleading of the person from the truth toward the chastisement of the burning fire *is sure and certain* [the emphasized part is the omitted predicate].[2]

Kutiba ʿalayhi literally means, "it is written against him," which refers

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1 This is deduced from the use of present tense (*yattabiʿu*), which implies continuity, and the word "every" (*kull*), which shows not stopping at any limit. (Trans.)

2 This is based on taking *fa-annahu yuḍilluhu…* not to be a complete sentence, but an incomplete clause which effectively indicates a quality or act of the devil. The author's interpretation is: "The quality of being misleading for his followers is a fixed and established quality for the rebellious devil." However, it is also possible—and more apparent—to take *fa-annahu yuḍilluhu…* as a complete clause which is at the same time the predicate of *whoever takes him for a guardian*. The current translation of the verse is based on this interpretation. (Trans.)

to God's decree about him. God has decreed that: (1) he shall lead his followers astray, and (2) he shall make them enter the fire. These two decrees are mentioned in the following verses: *Surely, as regards My servants, you have no authority over them except for the deviators who follow you. And surely Hell is the promised place for them all.* (15:42-43)

We discussed this in our exposition of these verses (volume 12 of the Arabic edition).

Some exegetes have interpreted this as follows: "It is *Allah* Who will lead astray whoever takes Satan [or a devil] for a master." This is a weak interpretation because there is no evidence for such decree in the Qur'an. Instead, the Qur'an says that God will "entrust" the person to Satan and give Iblīs authority over those who follow him and take him as a master, as seen in the verses quoted above [15:42-43]. Moreover, accepting this meaning would cause a discrepancy between the pronouns in the verse, since the pronoun "he" in *he shall lead him astray* would refer to God, while there has been no previous mention of God.

Another weak interpretation is:"It is written against one who *disputes about Allah without knowledge* that he shall lead anyone who takes him as a master astray," where all of the pronouns refer to *he who disputes about Allah without knowledge*.

It is inferred from the verse that what is decreed about Iblīs (the Devil) also applies to his ilk, progeny, and assistants (the devils).[1] Likewise, all of their acts—such as misguiding [from the truth] or guiding to the chastisement of the burning fire—are the acts of Iblīs. There is also a subtle linguistic beauty in using *yuḍilluhu* (lead astray, misguide) next to *yahdīhi* (lead, guide).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ
نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ مُضْغَةٍ مُخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ ۚ وَنُقِرُّ فِي
الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشُدَّكُمْ ۖ
وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ
شَيْئًا ۚ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِنْ

1 This is based on the word *shayṭān* in verse 22:3 meaning Satan (Iblīs) in particular, not devils in generals. (Trans.)

كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ ۝٥

(22:5) ***O people! If you are in doubt about the raising*** **(al-baʿth)**, ***then surely We created you from dust, then from a small seed, then from a clot*** **(ʿalaqah)**, ***then from a lump of flesh*** **(muḍghah)**, ***complete in make*** **(mukhallaqah)** ***and incomplete, that We may make (it) clear to you; and We cause what We will to stay in the wombs till an appointed time, then We bring you forth as babies, then that you may attain your maturity; and of you is he who is caused to die, and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything; and you see the land barren*** **(hāmidah)**, ***but when We send down water to it, it stirs*** **(ihtazzat)** ***and swells*** **(rabat)** ***and brings forth every kind of beautiful herbage.***

Al-baʿth refers to "the revival of the dead and their return to God." *ʿAlaqah* is "a piece of coagulated blood." *Muḍghah* is "a chewed lump of flesh." *Mukhallaqah* has been defined as"complete in creation." Therefore, "complete and incomplete in make" would match the stage of embryonic development when the fetus is given shape and form, which coincides with the blowing of spirit into it. This is confirmed by the definition of *takhlīq* (to create, to make) as *taṣwīr* (to give form, to fashion).

… that We may make (it) clear to you: Given the context, what We want to make clear to you is the possibility of resurrection. That is, all of the above is meant so that We may remove your uncertainty about afterlife. Observing these stages—where some inanimate dust is transformed into a seed (sperm), then a blood-clot, then a chewed lump of flesh, then a living human being—should leave room for any doubt concerning the possibility that the dead may rise back to life.[1] That is why the verse interjects *that We may make (it) clear to you* right here instead of putting it off to the end of the verse.

… and We cause what We will to stay in the wombs till an appointed time: That is, We choose which fetuses to keep in the wombs for the complete period of pregnancy.

… then We bring you forth as babies **(ṭiflan)**, ***then that you may attain***

1 The verse does not identify the object of *that We may make (it) clear to you*, but given the beginning of the verse and the next two verses, "it" refers to the possibility—or certainty—of resurrection. (Trans.)

***your maturity* (ashuddakum):** *Majmaᶜ al-bayā*n says: It means that "We bring you out of your mothers' wombs while you are babies." *Ṭifl* means a very young human being. It is singular even though it describes a plural noun because it is a verbal noun [which is used equally for singular and plural], like saying, "this man is justice" or "these men are justice" [to emphasize their justness].

Another suggested meaning is: "Then We bring out *each* of you as a baby."

Reaching *ashudd* means growing to the stage where one's organs and faculties are fully developed.

***… and of you is he who is caused to die, and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life* (ardhal al-ᶜumur):** Since these two groups are mentioned parallel and in contrast to each other, it shows that they indicate two different groups. Therefore, the first group is those who are caused to die *before* they are brought back to the worst part of life. *Ardhal al-ᶜumur* means "the lowest and most abject part of life," which corresponds to old age, for it is the worst stage of life compared to the previous parts.

… so that* (likaylā) *after having knowledge he does not know anything: It means that he does not know anything that people deem to be of significance, and based on which they live their lives. The letter *lām* in *likaylā* indicates *ghāyah* (purpose, objective). The meaning is: He will end up with the weakening of all of his powers and faculties, such that in terms of knowledge—which is the most precious product of life—he will have nothing of significance.

***… and you see the landbarren* (hāmidah), *but when We send down water to it, it stirs* (ihtazzat) *and swells* (rabat):** Al-Rāghib says: *Hamidat al-nār* means "the fire went out." A land without any vegetation is called *hāmidah*. A *hāmid* plant is one that is dry. God says: *And you see the land barren*.

A similar definition of *hāmidah* is "dead land." Al-Rāghib further says: *Al-hazz* is "violent movement and shaking." It is said, "I shook (*hazaztu*) the spear, and thus it started shaking (*ihtazza*)." *Ihtazzat al-nabāt* means "the plants stirred as they flourished."

He also says (summarized): *Rabā* is "to rise and grow." God says: *We send down water to it; it stirs and swells*, meaning that it increases and grows.

… and brings forth every kind (zawj) of beautiful (bahīj) herbage:

That is, the earth will bring forth every kind of plant that is characterized by *bahjah*, which means "having a beautiful color" and "being evidently happy." It could also be that *zawj* in this verse means a "pair" or an "even number," the opposite of odd (*fard*). Indeed the Qur'an describes plants as living beings that also have gender and mating. This is confirmed by the natural sciences today.

Therefore, in terms of producing and growing plants, the earth is similar to the womb which produces animal life as the dust turns to seed, to a clot, to a lump of flesh, and eventually to a living human being.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾

(22:6) ***This is because Allah is the Truth*** **(al-ḥaqq)** ***and because He gives life to the dead and because He has power over all things.***

"This" refers to what was mentioned in the last verse concerning: (1) the creation of human beings and plants; and (2) the continuous direction of their affairs after their original creation. Their creation and direction are real events that cannot be doubted. It is implied from this verse that what is meant by *al-ḥaqq* is "truth in and of itself." It is not an attribute of an omitted noun, saying that God is "something true and real."[1] Rather, God is the very reality Which brings about anything that is real, and Which conducts a system of truth in the universe. He is the essence of reality by which any reality is realized. He is the cause of the existence of any being or process that truly exists in the universe. The creation and direction of these events all show that God is the Truth.

… and because He gives life to the dead: This also refers to the previous verse. That is, the gradual transformation of dust to a living human being, the transformation of dead land to living plants due to rain, and the continuation of this cycle are *because He gives life to the dead*.

… and because He has power over all things: This sentence further complements the previous verse. That is, what was said in the previous verse is *because He has power over all things*. The initial creation of human beings and plants and the subsequent direction of their affairs are connected to all beings in the universe and all systems that run the world of existence. To create and direct human beings and plants, one must have

1 The omitted noun could be "Lord" or "Creator," where the verse would be saying: "God is the True Lord" or "God is the True Creator." (Trans.)

power over them, which in turn entails that one must have power over everything. Hence, their creation and direction are *caused by* an encompassing power. You may also say that their creation and direction are *signs* of an encompassing power.

وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٧﴾

(22:7) ***And because the Hour is coming, there is no doubt about it; and because Allah shall raise those who are in the graves.***

These are two sentences that add to the clause, *This is because Allah is the Truth* (22:6).

Therefore, these two verses [22:6-7] together draw five conclusions from verse 5. One might ask: What is special with these five points, as opposed to other possible conclusions from verse 5? For instance, one could also conclude: (1) God is the Lord; (2) one should not worship anyone besides Him; and (3) He is Benevolent, Generous and Omniscient?

Answer: The theme of these verses is to prove the truth of resurrection. By comparing these verses with other verses that serve the same purpose, we can infer that these verses aim to prove the existence of the resurrection based on God being the Absolute Truth. The actions of a being that is the Absolute Truth and Sheer Reality would be an act of truth that is free of every falsehood. But if God were to create and destroy, then create and destroy again, without any Hereafter where one would live in happiness or wretchedness [forever], then His acts would be vain sport and pointless game. Hence, there is a clear necessity for the Hereafter because God is a Truth that does not do anything except that which is true. Since the life of this world will end with death, there must be an eternal life after that.

Therefore, verses 5-7 are in line with other verses that prove the truth of the Hereafter, such as: *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in sport. We did not create them both but with the truth*. (44:38-39); *And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain; that is the opinion of those who disbelieve* (38:27)

The difference is that the other verses prove the truth of the Hereafter based on the truth of God's *acts*, but the current verses prove it based on the truth of God *Himself*. The truth of His acts is a direct implication and consequence of the truth of Himself.

A person who believes that making the dead alive is rationally

impossible would not accept any argument in support of its occurrence. Yet, everybody sees that God transforms dead dust into a living human being, and turns dead land into living plants. Therefore, it is certainly *possible* to give life to the dead, and that is why God says, *because He gives life to the dead*, refuting the notion of impossibility. Hence, this sentence serves the same purpose as other verses that prove the *possibility* of resurrection and a second life by first showing other similar cases of it. For example: *Says he: Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten? Say: He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is cognizant of all creation*. (36:78-79)

Next, given the *possibility* of afterlife, one may still doubt its actual *occurrence* because of being an unlikely and difficult event. God refutes this doubt and unlikelihood by saying: *because He has power over all things*. If One's power is unlimited, then it is equally feasible for Him to give life to something whether for the first time or the second time. Such an Actor would not find any difference between acts that might be easy or difficult otherwise. Such power will never fail, exhaust or weaken. This sentence serves the same purpose as other verses that prove the resurrection based on God's comprehensive and infinite power. For example: *Were We then fatigued by the first creation?* (50:15); *Most surely He Who gives it [the earth] life is the Giver of life to the dead; surely He has power over all things*. (41:39)

Therefore, verse 22:6 consists of three conclusions that are drawn from the previous verse, and they all provide arguments to prove that there will be a resurrection. This is summarized in the following verse: *And because the Hour is coming, there is no doubt about it; and because Allah shall raise those who are in the graves* (22:7).

This verse only talks about an event, which is the resurrection of the dead, and its time, which is the Hour. However, instead of attributing this event to God by saying, "and because *Allah* will bring about the Hour," it merely says: *and because the Hour is coming*. Perhaps the reason for not specifying the subject is to indicate that the event will occur suddenly, and no one knows when it will happen: *It will not come on you but of a sudden. They ask you as if you were awaiting it. Say: Its knowledge is only with Allah*. (7:187); *Surely the Hour is coming—I have almost hidden it—so that every soul may be recompensed for what it has strived for.* (20:15)

Therefore, not specifying *who* will bring the Hour is similar to not identifying *when* it will occur: they both emphasize that it is concealed,

and confirm that it will be abrupt and unexpected. Even though God speaks about the coming of the Hour in many places in His Book, He never mentions *who* will make it come.[1] Instead, He uses expressions such as "*the Hour is coming*," "*the Hour will come*," and "*it will come to them*."

The event that shall occur is the resurrection of the dead, as He says: *Allah shall raise those who are in the graves* (22:7).

Possible objection: What follows from the above argument is that everything should have a resurrection, because an act without an end is vain, whether it is the creation of humankind or any other being. However, the verse only asserts the resurrection of human beings.

Reply: Even though the verse only talks about the resurrection of human beings, it does not *deny* the possibility of other creatures being resurrected as well. The central theme and focus of these verses is the resurrection of humankind in particular. It could also be said that even if the other things do not have a resurrection, it does not render their creation a vain act by God because they have been created for the sake of humankind. The end and purpose of creation of the other beings is the human being, whose end in turn is the resurrection.

The above is what we can say by contemplating on these three verses [22:5-7] and comparing them with the other verses that prove the reality of afterlife, notwithstanding their variety. The above explanation should also clarify why these verses only talk about these conclusions in particular. They apparently present five points, but in fact they reduce to four: three conclusions in verse 6 that are made from verse 5, and one conclusion in verse 7 that is made from the three points in verse 6. Our exposition should also answer the problem of the seemingly repetitive sentences, as brought up by some exegetes: *He gives life to the dead* (22:6), *The Hour is coming* (22:7), and *Allah shall raise those who are in the graves* (22:7).[2]

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1 One exception to this is verse 34:3. (Trans.)

2 In short, what mentioned here is in line with the theme and context of the verses. The three conclusions in verse 22:6 are: (1) *Allah is the Truth*. (2) *He gives life to the dead*. (3) *He has power over all things*. The two conclusions in verse 22:7 reduce to one: (4) The Hour is coming for sure, when God shall raise those who are in the graves. The two parts of verse 22:7 are not repetitive because the first part refers to the suddenness of the Hour, while the second part refers to its inevitability. "*He gives life to the dead*" (22:6) is not a repetition of the other points because it (also) refers to God's custom of giving life to

Other exegetes have interpreted these verses and the arguments that they involve in numerous ways that are not plausible. They have added alien premises to the arguments of these verses that disturb the order of the verses and the soundness of their arguments. We have abstained from presenting them here. Interested readers should refer to the extensive books of *tafsīr*.

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وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ ﴿٨﴾

(22:8) ***And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and without guidance and without an illuminating book.***

This is another group of people who turn away from the truth. It is narrated from *Kashf al-Kashshāf* that this verse is about leaders, while verse 4 above (*And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and follows every rebellious devil*) was about followers.

This is because the next verse describes such a person as *that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah* (22:9), while the previous verse was about one who *follows every rebellious devil* (22:4).“Leading others astray” indicates that the person is a leader, while “following” shows that the person is a follower.

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“Knowledge,” “guidance” and “book”may each include the other two if used alone. However, since the verse distinguishes them, a specific sense must be intended for each of them. It has been said that what is meant by “knowledge” is necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*); what is meant by “guidance” is correct thinking and reasoning that leads to true knowledge; and what is meant by “illuminating book” is divine revelation which manifests the truth. The problem with this interpretation is that there is no reason to confine knowledge to necessary knowledge—which is also called self-evident (*badīhī*). Moreover, dispute (*jidāl*) can have two meanings: (1) being insistent and stubborn in debates and arguments in general; or (2) the specific sense of *jadal* in logic (dialectic), which is a syllogism that consists of accepted and acknowledged premises by the opponent. Either way, it is a means of arguing, but self-evident statements do not require argument.[1]

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the dead *in this world*. (Trans.)

1 Hence, knowledge cannot mean self-evident statements, because then the verse would be rebuking the person for not arguing over them. (Trans.)

Perhaps what is meant by "knowledge" is what one reaches by rational proof, and what is meant by "guidance" is what one reaches through God's guidance for those who serve and worship Him sincerely, whereby their hearts are illuminated by the light of knowledge. It could also be the other way around. Then "illuminating book" would be God's revelation that reaches the people through His prophets. Hence, they refer to three paths to knowledge in its absolute sense: (1) the way of *ʿaql* (reason, intellect); (2) the way of *baṣar* (sight or insight); and (3) the way of *samʿ* (hearing). These three are mentioned in the verse: *And follow not that of which you have not any knowledge; surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that*. (17:36)

God knows best.

ثَانِيَ عِطْفِهِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ لَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ ۖ وَنُذِيقُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٩﴾

(22:9) ***Turning away haughtily*** **(thāniya ʿiṭfihi)** ***to lead (others) astray from the way of Allah; for him is disgrace in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning.***

Thany is "to break," and *ʿiṭf* means "side." *Thany al-ʿaṭf* is a metaphor for "turning away," as if the person is breaking one of his sides over the other.

The clause, *that he may lead (others) astray from the way of Allah* is connected with what was mentioned before: disputing about God without knowledge and showing aversion and haughtiness in order to lead others astray. It describes the leaders of polytheism.

… for him is disgrace **(al-khizy)** ***in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection We will make him taste the punishment of burning:*** *Khizy* means "disgrace, humiliation, shame." The verse threatens this type of person with disgrace in this world, which is what happened to the leaders of the Quraysh and the great figures of polytheism in Mecca, as well as punishment in the Hereafter.

ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاكَ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٠﴾

(22:10) ***This is due to what*** **(bi-mā)** ***your two hands have sent ahead and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants.***

"This" refers to the threat of disgrace and punishment in the previous verse. *Due to* (indicated by the letter *bāʾ* in *bi-mā*) shows reciprocity, like

when one says, "I sold that *for* this." It may also indicate causality: "The disgrace and punishment that you see is your *retribution* for what you sent ahead; it is the *result* of disputing about God—not based on knowledge, guidance or an illuminating book, but only out of arrogant defiance to lead others astray." The verse switches from the third person to the second person to show censure and rebuke.

The clause *"and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants"* adds to the first part of the verse, saying that God does not wrong His servants, but treats each of them as they deserve according to their acts. He gives each of them what they ask with their inner tongue (*lisān al-ḥāl*).[1]

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرْفٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ ۖ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ
فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١١﴾

(22:11) ***And among people is he who serves Allah (standing) on the edge* (ḥarf)*, so that if good befalls him he is satisfied* (iṭmaʾanna) *therewith, but if a trial* (fitnah) *afflicts him he turns back* (inqalaba) *headlong; he loses this world as well as the Hereafter; that is a manifest loss.***

Ḥarf means "side, edge." *Iṭmiʾnān* means "rest, stability." *Fitnah* has been defined as *miḥnah* (ordeal, difficulty, hardship), and *inqilāb* is "to turn back."

This verse describes another group of people, other than the righteous believers. It describes those who serve and worship God only in one aspect, not every aspect; and only in certain circumstances, not all circumstances. Their worship is only based on the side of good, which means using religion for worldly ends. If anything good happens to them, they become firm and confident about serving God, but if a trouble or hardship afflicts them, they turn back their face without even looking to the right or left. They abandon their religion because they find it to be a source of misfortune, or because they hope to be saved from their loss and hardship by doing so. In fact, the polytheists had the same custom and mentality in serving and worshiping the idols: they used to serve the idols only to gain some good or avoid some evil through their intercession *in this world*, but they did not believe in the Hereafter. Such are those

1 *Lisān al-ḥāl* (language of condition or state) refers to a being's capacity to receive and absorb, irrespective of any verbal request. It is what a being calls for by its very mode of existence, spiritual state, and inner realization. (Trans.)

who waver and turn completely over, losing this world because of their troubles and afflictions, and losing the Hereafter because of turning away, forsaking and disbelieving in faith. *That is a manifest loss.*

This is what we can say from contemplating about the verse. Therefore, serving God *on the edge* is a metaphorical expression, which is then explained and elaborated by what follows: *so that if good befalls him…*

… he loses this world: because of the trial that afflicts him.

… as well as the Hereafter: because of turning back headlong.

يَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُ وَمَا لَا يَنْفَعُهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ ﴿١٢﴾

(22:12) ***He calls besides Allah upon that which does not harm him and that which does not benefit him. That is the great straying.***

"What is called upon" refers to the idols. They are not a source of any harm or benefit for their worshipers because they lack understanding and will. Rather, an idol-worshiper faces harm and loss [as mentioned in the next verse] because of his worship which is his own act.

يَدْعُو لَمَنْ ضَرُّهُ أَقْرَبُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِ ۚ لَبِئْسَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَبِئْسَ الْعَشِيرُ ﴿١٣﴾

(22:13) ***He calls*** **(yadʿū)** ***him whose*** **(la-man)** ***harm is nearer than his benefit; certainly an evil*** **(la-biʾs)** ***guardian*** **(mawlā)** ***and certainly an evil*** **(la-biʾs)** ***associate*** **(ʿashīr).**

Mawlā is "a helpful guardian." *ʿAshīr* means "companion, associate." Concerning the structure of the verse, it has been said that *yadʿū* means "say," and what is said is the rest of the verse. The letter *lām* in *la-man* is called *lāmal-ibtidāʾ* (commencement), which comes at the beginning of a sentence. The letter *lām* in *la-biʾs* is called *lām al-qasam* (swear, vow). What follows after it—*an evil guardian* and *an evil associate*—is what the persons swears. The verb that indicates the swearing is implied.

The meaning is: On the Day of Resurrection, this person who is now serving idols will describe the idols that he took as guardians and associates by saying, "I swear that an idol whose harm is nearer than his benefit is certainly an evil guardian and an evil associate."

The person will consider the idol's harm to be closer than its benefit based on what he will observe on the Day of Resurrection as the result serving that idol: everlasting punishment and eternal damnation.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٤﴾

(22:14) ***Surely Allah will cause those who believe and do good deeds to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow; surely Allah does what He wants.***

The previous verses talked about three groups of disbelievers and characterized them by error and loss: (1) the leaders who dispute about God without knowledge and who are followed by others; (2) the followers who follow every rebellious devil and who dispute like their leaders; and (3) the wavering worshipers who serve God on the margins. This verse contrasts these groups with another group: those who believe and do good deeds. They will have a noble reward and an excellent end; this is what God has willed for them. These groups are mentioned to set the stage for the next verses which describe them in further detail and talk about God's judgment between them.

مَنْ كَانَ يَظُنُّ أَنْ لَنْ يَنْصُرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ بِسَبَبٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ لْيَقْطَعْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ هَلْ يُذْهِبَنَّ كَيْدُهُ مَا يَغِيظُ ﴿١٥﴾

(22:15) ***Whoever has been thinking that Allah will not assist him in this life and the Hereafter, let him stretch a rope*** **(sabab)** ***above him, then let him sever (it)*** **(yaqṭaᶜ)***, then let him see if his struggle will take away what he is enraged at.***

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says: *Sabab* is anything that can be used to reach or connect to something. That is why it has been used for a rope, a road, and a door.[1]

In this verse, *sabab* means "rope." The meaning of *qaṭᶜ* is well-known (cut, break), but one of its meanings is also *ikhtināq* (strangle, suffocate, choke), apparently because this is when the breath is cut off.

First possible meaning: It has been said that the pronoun "him" in *whoever has been thinking that Allah will not assist him* refers to the Prophet. The polytheists in Mecca believed that the religion which the Prophet had brought was a baseless fable. Therefore, they thought his religion would not spread and he was bound to fail, since he was of no significance to God. But God supported His Messenger when he migrated to Medina: he became renowned and his religion spread. This greatly enraged

1 *Sabab* is often used to mean "cause" or "reason." (Trans.)

the polytheists. Here God rebukes them and says that He will certainly help His Prophet, and that their rage will not disappear even if they strangle themselves. In other words, their cunning plots are futile. The meaning is: If any of the polytheists think that God will not assist His Prophet in this life and in the Hereafter—by spreading his name and religion in this world and by granting forgiveness and mercy to him and those who believe in him in the Hereafter—and is enraged by seeing God's support for the Prophet, then he should tie a rope above himself[1]—like to a tall tree—and strangle himself. Let him see if doing so will take away his rage.

This is a good meaning that complies with the context of the verses and what we mentioned before about the chapter being revealed shortly after the migration, when the polytheists of Mecca were still strong and mighty.

Second possible meaning: According to some other exegetes, the pronoun "him" in *Allah will not assist him* refers to *whoever thinks*; *qaṭʿ* here means "treading"or"traveling a distance" (instead of "sever"); and tying a *sabab* (rope) to the *samāʾ* (sky, heaven) means ascending to the heavens to invalidate God's decree. The meaning is: "Whoever thinks that God will not assist him in this life and the Hereafter should climb to the sky by some means and travel this distance so that he may see if this struggle would change the divine decree that enrages him." The apparent meaning of this interpretation is that it is incumbent for everyone to have hope in their Lord in their worldly and otherworldly affairs. If people do not have hope in their Lord, think that God will not assist them in the two worlds, and are bitter about this, then they must plan and do whatever they can—but none of that will avail them.

Third possible meaning: A third view is that the pronoun "him" in *Allah will not assist him* refers to *whoever thinks* (as in the second interpretation), but "assistance" (*naṣr*) means *rizq* (provision, sustenance). For example, a land that is rained upon is called: *arḍ manṣūrah*. The meaning in this case will be similar to the previous interpretation.

This interpretation is more congruent with the apparent meaning of the verse than the previous one, but both of these meanings suffer from the disconnection of this verse from the preceding verses. Furthermore, if the pronoun "him" in *Allah will not assist him* referred to *whoever thinks*,

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1 The term in the verse is *samāʾ*, which is often translated as "heaven" or "sky," but it is also used for anything that is above one's head, like the ceiling. (Trans.)

then it would be more appropriate to say *man ẓanna* (whoever thought), not *man kāna yaẓunnu* (whoever has been thinking). The expression in the verse is the latter, which shows continuous thought beginning in the past. This confirms the first suggested meaning.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

(22:16) ***And thus*** **(kadhālika)** ***have We revealed it as clear signs,and that Allah guides whom He desires.***

The first part of this verse describes something universal that has many members [that is, the Qur'an which has many verses] by describing one of its members as a representative of the group. This is indicated by the word *kadhālika* (thus, like this), as we have already mentioned repeatedly under other similar verses. It shows that what is said about that one member equally applies to the other members of the group. For example, one sees Zayd and ʿAmr talking with each other and walking on two feet, and then says, "This is how the human is" (in singular), meaning that talking and walking on the two feet are applicable to all humans (in plural). The meaning is: We have revealed the Qur'an, which consists of clear *āyāt* (verses, signs) like the ones seen in the previous verses in this chapter.

… and that Allah guides whom He desires: This is the predicate of an omitted subject. The implied meaning is: "*It is true* that God guides whom He desires." This means that if He does not want to guide someone, then that person will have no guide. In other words, the clarity of the verses and arguments is not sufficient to guide a person who hears or even contemplates them, unless God wills for that person to be guided.

Some exegetes have said that this sentence adds to the pronoun "it" in *and thus have We revealed it* (22:16). The meaning would be: "And thus We revealed that God guides whom He desires." However, the first meaning is more apparent and connects more clearly with the first part of the verse.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 22:3 (*and follows every rebellious* (marīd) *devil*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Marīd* means *khabīth* (wicked, malicious, evil).

(2) Concerning verse 22:3 (*And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge*) Abū Mālik said: This was revealed

about Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith.[1]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* also narrates this on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of Ibn Jurayj. However, this is apparently a case of matching and applying the verse (*taṭbīq*), as is the case with most narrations about the contexts of revelation. There is yet another account [also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*] from Mujāhid, saying that verse 22:8 (*And among people is the one who disputes about Allah without knowledge and without guidance*) was revealed about Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith. This is more acceptable than the above narration [from Abū Mālik], because Naḍr was one of the prominent figures of the time and verse 22:8 is about leaders, while verse 22:3 is about followers.[2]

(3) Concerning verse 22:5 (*mukhallaqah* and *ghayri mukhallaqah*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Mukhallaqah* is a complete fetus, while *ghayri mukhallaqah* is one that miscarries.

(4) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Masʿūd said: The Messenger of God—the truthful whose truthfulness has been confirmed—told us, "The creation of each of you in the womb of his mother is completed in: (1) forty days of being a *nuṭfah* (small seed, zygote); (2) forty days of being an *ʿalaqah* (clot); and (3) forty days of being a *muḍghah* (lump of flesh). Then an angel is sent to blow the spirit in it, and it is decreed that four things should be written [for him]: his sustenance, his death, his acts, and whether he will be wretched or felicitous. By the One Whom there is no god but Him, some of you may perform the acts of the people of Paradise until he is only a cubit away from it, but then his written destiny will overtake him: he will do as the people of Hell and will thus enter therein. And some of you may perform the acts of the people of Hell until he is only a cubit away from it, but then his written destiny will overtake him: he will do as the people of Paradise and will thus enter therein."[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 It is very likely that Abū Mālik's narration is also about verse 22:8, because the part of the verse mentioned in the narration is common in both verses. (Trans.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*.

Author's comment: This has also been narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, Anas, and Ḥudhayfah b. Usayd, from the Prophet. There are some differences in some of these narrations. One version says:

The angel will be told, "Go to the Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*) and transcribe from there the qualities of this seed." The angel will do so and will accompany the seed until all of those qualities are realized in it….[1]

Similar traditions have been narrated through Shia chains of transmission from the Imams. For example:

(5) Imam al-Riḍā said: So when the four months are complete, God will send two creator angels to it who will form it and write its sustenance, its death, and whether it will be wretched or felicitous….[2]

Author's comment: We also reported a hadith from *al-Kāfī* at the beginning of Sūrah Āl-i ʿImrān [under verse 3:6] where Imam al-Bāqir talks about the formation of a fetus and the writing of what has been decreed for it. Part of that hadith is:

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: …The two angels write everything that has been decreed for it based on a tablet that is affixed to its mother's forehead. So they transcribe everything that is in that tablet while specifying one condition: if there is no change in God's decree (*badāʾ*)…[3]

Author's comment: There are also other similar narrations which confirm that it is possible for a child's destiny to change, contrary to the previous set of traditions. There is no contradiction between these two points, because everything, including humankind, has a place in the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) and a place in the Tablet of Effacement and Establishment (*lawḥ al-maḥw wa-al-ithbāt*). The former cannot be changed, while the latter can be changed. In other words, there are two kinds of decrees: inevitable and changeable, as God says: *Allah effaces and establishes what He wills, and with Him is the Mother of the Book* (13:39).

In our discussion about God's decree (*qaḍāʾ*) [in the previous volumes],

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

2 *Qurb al-isnād*, on the authority of Ḥimyarī, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Abī Naṣr.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

it became clear that the tablet of written decrees—whatever its reality may be—corresponds to the system of causes and effects in the universe. This tablet consists of two chains: (1) the chain of perfect cause and effect, where there is no change; and (2) the chain of incomplete cause and effect, which is the opposite of the first. The first set of traditions quoted above refers to God's inevitable decree concerning the fetus, while the second set of traditions refers to His changeable decree. There is no contradiction between a servant's acts being inevitably decreed and the person's free will in performing those acts, as we discussed before.

(7) Salām b. al-Mustanīr said: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about God's words, *mukhallaqah* and *ghayri mukhallaqah* (22:5). He said,"*Mukhallaqah* refers to the particles that God created in the loins of Adam. He made a covenant with them, then He made them pass through the loins of men and the wombs of women, until they come to this world so that they may be questioned about their covenant. But *ghayri mukhallaqah* refers to those whom God did not create in the loins of Adam when He created the particles and made a covenant with them. They are the sperms that are not conceived and the fetuses that miscarry before they are invested with spirit, life and subsistence."[1]

Author's comment: The meaning of this hadith was discussed in our examination of narrations under verse 7:172.

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq narrated from his father: When a servant reaches the age of one hundred, it is the worst part of life (*ardhal al-ʿumur*).[2]

Author's comment: Some other traditions in this regard were presented under verse 16:70.

(9) Ibn ʿAbbās said: Sometimes the Bedouins would come to the Prophet [in Medina] and convert to Islam. When they returned to their towns, if they had a good year of rain, crop and offspring [of their cattle or themselves], they would say, "This new religion of ours is good," and they would stick to it. But if they faced a bad year of rain, crop and offspring [of their cattle or themselves],

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. al-Mughīrah.

they would say, "There is no good in this new religion of ours." Thus God revealed: *And among people is he who serves Allah (standing) on the edge* (22:11).[1]

Author's comment: This has also been narrated from him [Ibn ʿAbbās] through another chain.

(10) Once Zurārah asked Imam al-Bāqir about God's words, *And among people is he who serves Allah (standing) on the edge* (22:11). The Imam said: Indeed there were some people who worshiped God alone and stopped worshiping others, which means that they were no longer polytheists. However, they did not recognize Muḥammad as the messenger of God. So they worshiped God while entertaining doubts concerning Muḥammad and the message that he brought. They went to the Prophet [and accepted Islam] saying to themselves, "We shall wait and see: if our wealth increases, and if we and our children are healthy, then we will know that he is the Messenger of God. But if it happens otherwise, then we will hold back." God says: *If good befalls him he is satisfied therewith*, referring to worldly well-being. *If a trial afflicts him* refers to personal tribulations. *He turns back headlong* means that he turns back to his old polytheism due to his doubt. *He loses this world as well as the Hereafter; that is a manifest loss. He calls besides Allah upon that which does not harm him and that which does not benefit him*: This means that he becomes a polytheist and starts calling upon and worshiping other than God….[2]

Author's comment: Al-Ṣadūq has also reported this hadith in *al-Tāwḥīd*, with minor differences.

(11) Ibn ʿAbbās said: *Whoever has been thinking that Allah will not assist him [in this life and the Hereafter]*: [It means] whoever used to think that God will never assist Muḥammad. *Let him stretch a* sabab *to the* samāʾ: [It means] let him tie a rope to the ceiling of his house. *Then let him sever (it)*: [It means] let him hang from it until he dies.[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh, via an authentic chain of narration.

2 *Al-Kāfi*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Fāryābī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn

Author's comment: Even though this is Ibn ʿAbbās' interpretation of the verse, it implies the context of revelation of the verse. That is why we narrated it here.

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Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and Ibn Mardawayh.

Verses 17-24

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ
اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ
يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ
وَالشَّجَرُ وَالدَّوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ ۗ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ
فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ ﴿١٨﴾ هَٰذَانِ خَصْمَانِ اخْتَصَمُوا فِي
رَبِّهِمْ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قُطِّعَتْ لَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ مِنْ نَارٍ يُصَبُّ مِنْ فَوْقِ رُءُوسِهِمُ
الْحَمِيمُ ﴿١٩﴾ يُصْهَرُ بِهِ مَا فِي بُطُونِهِمْ وَالْجُلُودُ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَهُمْ مَقَامِعُ مِنْ حَدِيدٍ ﴿٢١﴾ كُلَّمَا
أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ
فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا ۖ وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَهُدُوا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ
الْقَوْلِ وَهُدُوا إِلَىٰ صِرَاطِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(22:17) *Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who associate (others with Allah)—surely Allah will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection; surely Allah is a witness over all things.*

(22:17) *Do you not see that Allah is He to Whom prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people; and there are many who deserve punishment; and whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honorable; surely Allah does what He pleases.*

(22:17) *These are two adversaries who dispute about their Lord; then (as to) those who disbelieve, for them are cut out garments of fire, boiling water shall be poured over their heads.*

(22:17) *With it shall be melted what is in their bellies and (their) skins as well.*
(22:17) *And for them are whips of iron.*
(22:17) *Whenever they want to go forth from it, from grief, they shall be returned to it—and taste the chastisement of burning.*
(22:17) *Surely Allah will make those who believe and do good deeds enter gardens beneath which rivers flow; they shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and (with) pearls, and their garments therein shall be of silk.*
(22:17) *And they are guided to goodly words and they are guided onto the path of the Praised One.*

Introduction

The previous verses discussed the differences between four groups of people concerning God: (1) some are blind followers who dispute about God without knowledge; (2) some are misguiding leaders who dispute about God without knowledge; (3) some are uncertain individuals who worship God on the edge; and (4) some are believers in God who do good deeds. These verses continue to say that God is a witness over them and He will settle their differences on the Day of Resurrection. Furthermore, all of these groups are in reality humble, subdued and in prostration before His magnificence and grandeur, even though some of them may refrain from prostrating to Him outwardly. They are the ones for whom God's punishment has become necessary. The verses then describe the reward and punishment that will be meted out to the believers and non-believers after their judgment on the Day of Resurrection.

Commentary

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾

(22:17) ***Surely those who believe and those who are Jews*** **(alladhīna hādū)** ***and the Sabeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who associate (others with Allah)—surely Allah will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection; surely Allah is a witness over all things.***

Based on the contrast between the groups, *those who believe* are those

who believe in Muḥammad and the Qur'an. *Alladhīna hādū* are those who believe in Moses and the prophets before him, but not the prophets after him. Their book was the Torah, which was burnt by Nebuchadnezzar—the Babylonian king—when he defeated them in the mid-seventh century B.C. Thus they had no scripture for a period of time, until it was rewritten by Ezra the priest in the early sixth century B.C. That was when the Persian king Cyrus defeated Babylonia and freed the Israelites from captivity, when they returned to the Holy Land.

The Sabeans are not the same as star-worshipers, because that would be a sub-group of idolaters, while the verse mentions the Sabeans as a different category from *those who associate (others with Allah).* According to some exegetes, they are a group in between the Jews and Magians, with a scripture that they attribute to Prophet John, the son of Zachariah [John the Baptist]. Today each of them is commonly called a Ṣābī. We talked about them in our commentary of the verse: *Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans*…. (2:62)[1]

The Christians are those who believe in Jesus Christ son of Mary and the prophets before him. Their sacred books are the four Gospels of Luke, Mark, Matthew and John, as well as the books of the Old Testament as approved and canonized by the Church. However, the Qur'an says that their [original] scripture is the Gospel (Injīl) that was revealed to Jesus.

The Magians are well-known: they are those who believe in Zoroaster, notwithstanding much uncertainty about when he lived and appeared, as if there were no information about it. Their sacred book is the Avesta, which they lost when Alexander conquered Persia. The book was rewritten during the Sassanid era. That is why it is difficult to know for sure the essence of their religion. However, it is certain that they believe in two sources for the direction of the affairs of this world: a good source and an evil source. The former is called Yazdān (God) or light, and the latter is called Ahrīman (the Devil) or darkness. They consider the angels to be sacred beings and seek nearness to God through them, but they do not make idols out of them, unlike the idolaters. They also consider the [four] simple elements of the nature to be sacred, especially fire. They used to have fire temples in Persia, China, India and elsewhere. They trace all of these [Yazdān, Ahrīman, angels and fire] back to the Creator of all:

1 See volume 1, of the English translation. (Trans.)

Ahūra Mazdā.

Those who associate (others with Allah) are the idolaters and idol-worshipers. They fall into three main groups: Sabean idolatry, Brahman idolatry, and Buddhist idolatry. There have also been others with their own idols and ritual worship who did not subscribe to any particular order, such as the Arab Bedouins and other tribes around the world, which were discussed in detail under verses 11:36-49.

… surely* (inna) *Allah will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection: This is about settling the differences and disagreements between adherents to the above mentioned paths and religions. It means distinguishing and setting apart the followers of truth from the followers of falsehood in a clear and decisive way that is not veiled or obscured by anything.

Inna (surely, indeed) indicates the verse's subject. It is repeated in the verse for emphasis, as there has been a long gap between the *inna* at the beginning of the verse and its predicate at the end. The same is seen in the following verses:

Yet surely (inna) *your Lord—to those who flee after they are persecuted, then they struggle hard and are patient—most surely* (inna) *your Lord after that is Forgiving, Merciful.* (16:110)

Yet surely (inna) *your Lord—to those who do evil in ignorance, then repent after that and make amends—most surely* (inna) *your Lord after that is Forgiving, Merciful.* (16:119)

… surely Allah is a witness over all things: This sentence implies that God judges between them based on truth, which justifies the previous part of the verse about God's judgment between these groups.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ
وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالدَّوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ
ۗ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۩ ﴿١٨﴾

(22:18) ***Do you not see that Allah is He to Whom prostrates* (yasjudu) *whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals and many of the people? And for many the punishment has become due. And whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honorable; surely Allah does what He wills.***

This verse apparently addresses anyone who can see and be addressed, and "seeing" means "knowing and realizing." It is also possible that the verse addresses the Prophet in particular, and "seeing" means "the vision of the heart," as in these verses: *The heart was not untrue in (making him see) what he saw. What! Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw?*(53:11-12)

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The verse talks about the prostration of unintelligent beings such as the sun, the moon, the stars and the mountains. This shows that what is meant by prostration here is existential prostration (*al-sajdah al-takwīniyyah*), which is when the entire existence of a being is subject to God's dominance and sovereignty, and is humble before His might and grandeur. This would imply that "*whoever is on the earth*" includes all human beings, both believers and unbelievers, because there is no exception to existential prostration and universal humbleness.

The verse specifically talks about *whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth* even though the heavens and the earth also prostrate to God. This clarifies the main message and focus of the verse: all creatures, whether celestial or earthly, and whether intelligent or unintelligent, are prostrating humbly in their essence toward God's might and grandeur. They are continually in such existential and involuntary prostration to God.

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The expression, *and many of the people* adds to the previous groups: *whoever is in the heavens and on the earth*…. Since all people are already included in *whoever is on the earth*, the addition of *many of the people* shows that what is meant here is another type of prostration, although both types are common in humility. This other type is voluntary and legislative prostration (*al-sujūd al-tashrīʿī*), which is when one throws oneself on the ground as an expression of his servitude to God, and in line with his involuntary existential humility before Him.

… And for many the punishment has become due. And whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honorable: This group is the opposite of the previous one. It is about the many people who refuse to prostrate. The verse describes them by the necessary *result* of their voluntary decision: chastisement, which is an inevitable retribution for those who display arrogance before God and refuse to humble themselves before Him. The verse mentions their chastisement instead of their action to indicate that this chastisement is their *very action* that will be returned

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to them. It also sets the ground for what follows: *and whomsoever Allah abases, there is none who can make him honorable,* which shows that their refusal to prostrate will be followed by an abasing and humiliating chastisement after which there shall be no honor or good.

God has willed that their refusal to prostrate will necessitate a punishment for them: an abasement after which there shall be no honor. This is because all good is in God's hand, as the Qur'an says: *In Your hand is the good* (3:26). So if God deprives someone of good, no one else can provide it for him.

… surely Allah does what He wills: This sentence expresses God's absolute power. It also justifies the previous part of the verse and explains why there shall be inevitable chastisement for those who arrogantly refuse to prostrate, and why they shall be humiliated once and for all.

Overall, the implied meaning is (and God knows best): God will surely settle all disagreements on the Day of Resurrection. After all, as you know, all beings, whether transcendent or corporeal, are humble and subservient before Him existentially. However, people are divided into two groups: those who show humility and obedience to God in worship and servitude, and those who arrogantly turn away from doing so. The latter are the ones who deserve chastisement, and whom God shall abase with such humiliation that shall have no honor afterwards. This is because He has power over anything that He pleases, and does whatever He wills.

The above interpretation clearly connects the verse to the previous verse.

هَٰذَانِ خَصْمَانِ اخْتَصَمُوا فِي رَبِّهِمْ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قُطِّعَتْ لَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ مِنْ نَارٍ يُصَبُّ مِنْ فَوْقِ رُءُوسِهِمُ الْحَمِيمُ ﴿١٩﴾

(22:19) ***These are two adversaries who dispute about their Lord*** **(rabbihim)*****; then (as to) those who disbelieve, for them are cut out garments of fire, boiling water shall be poured over their heads.***

The "two adversaries" refer to two groups that were mentioned in the last two verses. Verse 22:17 referred to them by saying: *Surely Allah will decide between them on the Day of Resurrection*. Verse 22:18 referred to them as *and many of the people* and *for many the punishment has become due*.

Even though there are numerous religions and sects, the verse has summarized them into only two adversaries. This shows that all of those

groups fall under either of two categories: rightful and wrongful. The only way to reduce the very many divergent schools and denominations to two is by classifying them based on truth and falsehood. The rightful are those who believe in the truth, and the wrongful are those who deny it. Even though all of these different groups are summed up as "two adversaries," they have many diverging views and opinions. This is elegantly shown by saying *two adversaries* (khaṣmān) *who dispute* (ikhtaṣamū), where the subject is in dual form (*khaṣmān*) but the verb is plural (*ikhtaṣamū*), instead of having the subject and verb both in plural (*jamᶜ*) or both in the dual (*tathniyah*) form.[1]

The dispute of the two adversaries is about their Lord (*rabbihim*), meaning that they differ with regards to God's attribute of Lordship. That is, all of the differences between various sects and religions trace back to a difference about this attribute, no matter how diverse they are. One group is the believers who do good deeds. They are those who describe God by names, attributes and actions that are worthy of Him. They believe in these true qualities, and act according to their belief, which makes their actions righteous. Then there are those who do not describe God by the names and attributes that befit Him. For example, some deny His unity by assuming that He has a partner or a child. Others see nature or the universe as the source of creation and existence. Some deny messengership altogether, and some accept certain prophets but not all. What is common in them is that they deny some necessary component of the true religion. They are called *kāfir* (disbeliever, infidel; lit. "one who covers") because they cover the truth. Thus, the two adversaries are the believers in their Lord and those who cover the truth (that is, the disbelievers).

The verses continue to talk about the end and reward of the two adversaries after their dispute is settled, starting with the disbelievers: *then* (as to) *those who disbelieve, for them are cut out garments of fire, boiling water* (al-ḥamīm) *shall be poured over their heads* (22:19). *Ḥamīm* means "boiling hot water."

يُصْهَرُ بِهِ مَا فِي بُطُونِهِمْ وَالْجُلُودُ ﴿٢٠﴾

(22:20) ***With it shall be melted*** **(yuṣharu)** ***what is in their bellies and***

1 In Arabic, in addition to the singular and plural forms, there is also a two-person form with its own pronouns and verb conjugations. (Trans.)

(their) skins as well.

Ṣahr means *idhābah* (to melt, to fuse, to dissolve). The verse is saying that boiling water will melt and roast their bowels within their bellies, as well as their skins.

وَلَهُمْ مَقَامِعُ مِنْ حَدِيدٍ ﴿٢١﴾

(22:21) ***And for them are whips*** **(maqāmiʿ)** ***of iron.***

Maqāmiʿ is the plural of *maqmaʿah*, meaning "hammer" or "pestle."

كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(22:22) ***Whenever they want to go forth from it, from grief, they shall be returned to it—and taste the chastisement of burning*** **(al-ḥarīq).**

From it means from the fire, which is then further elaborated by "*from grief*." It could also be that *from grief* shows the reason why they desire to exit *from it* [that is, from the fire]. *Ḥarīq* means *muḥriq* (burning, that which burns), just as *alīm* means *muʾlim* (painful, that which hurts).

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا ۖ وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(22:23) ***Surely Allah will make those who believe and do good deeds enter gardens beneath which rivers flow; they shall be adorned therein with bracelets*** **(asāwir)** ***of gold and (with) pearls, and their garments therein shall be of silk.***

It has been said that *asāwir* is the plural of *aswirah*, which, according to al-Rāghib, is the Arabicized version of *dastwārah* (bracelet).[1] The rest of the verse is clear.

وَهُدُوا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَهُدُوا إِلَىٰ صِرَاطِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(22:24) ***And they are guided to goodly words and they are guided onto the path of the Praised One*** **(al-Ḥamīd).**

A "goodly word" is a speech that is completely free from evil (*khabāthah*). It is the opposite of evil word, which includes any kinds of false, invalid or vain speech. "Goodly words" in this verse can be matched

1 *Dastwārah* is Persian, meaning a bracelet or wristband that is worn around the hand as an ornament. (Trans.)

with the following verse: *Their cry in it shall be "Glory to Thee, O Allah!" and their greeting in it shall be "Peace," and the last of their cry shall be "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds."* (10:10)

… and they are guided to goodly words: This means that God facilitates their path toward these words. *Al-Ḥamīd* is one the names of God. Thus, *they are guided onto the path of the Praised One* means that their actions are all praised and commendable, just as their speeches are all goodly and right.

There is a clear contrast between this verse and verse 22 above: *Whenever they want to go forth from it, from grief, they shall be returned to it—and taste the chastisement of burning.*

Examining Narrations

(1) Imamᶜ Alī once said, "Ask me before you lose me."
At that point, al-Ashᶜath b. Qays got up and asked, "O Commander of the Faithful! How come you receive tribute from the Magians even though they did not have a prophet and no scripture was sent to them?"
The Imam said, "Nay Ashᶜath! Indeed God sent a scripture to them with a messenger. But one night their king got drunk, summoned his own daughter, and slept with her. When the news spread among the people in the morning, they gathered in front of his door and said, 'Your Majesty! You have defiled and ruined our religion. Now come out so that we may purify you and apply the proper penalty to you.'
The king said, 'Gather around and hear what I have to say; perhaps there is a way out for me in this. If not, then it will be up to you to decide.' When they all gathered he told them, 'Do you agree that God has not created anyone nobler to him than our father Adam and our mother Eve?' 'Yes, you are right, Your Majesty,' they confirmed. He continued, 'And is it not true that he [Adam] gave his daughters in marriage to his sons? Didn't his sons marry his daughters?'
They said, 'Yes, you are right. This is the [right] religion.' So they collectively agreed upon that. As a result, God effaced knowledge [of their religion] from their hearts and took away His Book from them. Hence, they are infidels that will enter Hell immediately,

without any reckoning. Yet, the hypocrites are worse than them." Al-Ashʿath said, "By God I have not ever heard anything like this answer. By God I will never ask such a question again."[1]

Author's comment: "Yet, the hypocrites are worse than them" is a subtle hint to al-Ashʿath [who was a hypocrite]. There are also other traditions that suggest that the Magians were people of the book. According to some of these narrations, they had a prophet whom they killed, and they had a scripture which they burned.

(2) Concerning *surely Allah does what He wills* (22:18) it is narrated that Once Imamʿ Alī was told, "There is a man here who talks against God's will and decree (*mashīʾah*, *mashiyyah*)."

The Imam told him, "O servant of God! Did God create you based on His will or based on yours?" The man answered, "Rather He created me based on His will."

The Imam continued, "When He makes you fall ill, is it based on His will or based on yours?" "It is based on His will," the man admitted.

"When He makes you heal, is it based on His will or based on yours?" The man replied, "It is based on His will."

The Imam said, "Would He take you to Paradise based on His will or based on yours?" He said, "Based on His will."

The Imam concluded, "By God, had you said otherwise I would have surely struck you on the head[2] with the sword."[3]

Author's comment: The same has been narrated in *al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, on the authority of Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his father, except that it does not include the word "Paradise" in the last question: "Would He make you enter [any affair, or Paradise] based on His will or based on yours?" We already discussed another narration on the same subject under verse 2:26 (*But He does not cause to err by it (any) except the transgressors*).

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1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Aṣbagh b. Nubātah.

2 The narration literally says, "I would have surely struck the part that carries your eyes." (Trans.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Lālakāʾī's *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, and al-Khulaʿī's *al-Fawāʾid*.

(3) Imam Riḍā said: Will (*mashīʾah*, *mashiyyah*) is one of God's attributes of actions (*ṣifāt al-afʿāl*). Therefore, if one thinks that God has eternally been *murīd* and *shāʾī* (possessor of will and volition), then that person is not a [perfect] monotheist.[1]

Author's comment: The Imam has used *murīd* and *shāʾī* synonymously, implying that *irādah* (volition, want) and *mashīʾah* (will) are the same. This is indeed the case, because *mashīʾah* (will) is an agent's quality of being able to consciously do some act. Then, when the action is complete such that it cannot be separated from the agent, the same quality is called *irādah* (volition). Either way, this quality is not an essential attribute of a subject, but it is accidental to one's essence. Hence, God's attribute of will or decree is not like his attributes of knowledge and power, because His Essence is not subject to any kind of change due to the occurrence of any accident. Will or decree is an attribute of God's action: it is derived and deduced when God does an action, or when He sets the grounds for an action.

When we say "God willed an act," it can have two meanings: (i) God *executed* that act knowing that it is the most befitting (*aṣlaḥ*) thing to do; or (ii) He *prepared the means* of that act knowing that it is the most befitting thing to do. A subject's will is something external and subsequent to the subject's essence, as we find it in ourselves. Hence, if we claim that God has always had a will, it entails that there has been something eternal besides His Essence, which contradicts His unity (*tawḥīd*). Unless one defines will as the *knowledge* of the most befitting thing, and knowledge is an essential attribute of God. In that case, God would be eternally *murīd* (possessed of will), because He *knows* eternally what is the best thing to do. This would be reducing God's will to His knowledge, which is perfectly acceptable. However, if we accept this definition, then will would not be a separate attribute alongside life, knowledge and power.

(4) It is narrated that Abū Dharr swore that *These are two adversaries…* (22:24) was revealed about two groups of three individuals that confronted each other in the Battle of Badr. They were Ḥamzah b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, ʿUbaydat b. al-Ḥārith and ʿAlī b. AbīṬālib on one side; and ʿUtbat b. Rabīʿah, Shaybat b. Rabīʿa and al-Walīd b. ʿUtbah on the other side.

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1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Sulaymān b. Jaʿfar al-Jaʿfarī.

Similarly, ʿAlī said: I will be the first person to kneel on my knees before God on the Day of Resurrection to dispute against my adversaries.[1]

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* also reports this narration from several collections of hadith on the authority of Qays b. Saʿd b. ʿUbādah, Ibn ʿAbbās and others. *Majmāʿ al-bayān*narrates it from Abū Dharr and ʿAṭāʾ.

(5) Al-Naḍr b. Mālik says: Once I said to Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, "O Abā ʿAbd-Allāh! Tell me about God's words: *These are two adversaries who dispute about their Lord.*"

He said, "We and the Umayyads have disputed about God, for we say that God has told the truth, while they say that God has lied. Thus we shall be the two adversaries on the Day of Resurrection."[2]

Author's comment: This hadith is an example of applying the verse to a particular instance (*jary*). Likewise is the next tradition:

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Those who disbelieve, for them are cut out garments of fire*: This is about those who disbelieve in the *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority) of ʿAlī.[3]

(7) Concerning *And they are guided to goodly words* (22:24) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "It means God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*)." Concerning *and they are guided onto the path of the Praised One* (22:24) he said: "It means *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority)."

Author's comment: A similar tradition is found in *al-Maḥāsin*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḍarīs, from Imam al-Bāqir.

(8) The Prophet said, "Praise is not as beloved to anyone as it is to God."[4]

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ibn Abī Shaybah, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

2 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥamzah.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

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Verses 25-37

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ
لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِإِلْحَادٍ بِظُلْمٍ نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابٍ
أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ
لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا
وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾ لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ
اللَّهِ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَعْلُومَاتٍ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ ۖ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا
الْبَائِسَ الْفَقِيرَ ﴿٢٨﴾ ثُمَّ لْيَقْضُوا تَفَثَهُمْ وَلْيُوفُوا نُذُورَهُمْ وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ
﴿٢٩﴾ ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعَظِّمْ حُرُمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ ۗ وَأُحِلَّتْ لَكُمُ الْأَنْعَامُ
إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ ﴿٣٠﴾
حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتَخْطَفُهُ
الطَّيْرُ أَوْ تَهْوِي بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٍ سَحِيقٍ ﴿٣١﴾ ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعَظِّمْ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا
مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ ﴿٣٢﴾ لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ثُمَّ مَحِلُّهَا إِلَى الْبَيْتِ
الْعَتِيقِ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ
الْأَنْعَامِ ۗ فَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ
وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَهُمْ وَالْمُقِيمِي الصَّلَاةِ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ
يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَالْبُدْنَ جَعَلْنَاهَا لَكُمْ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ فِيهَا خَيْرٌ ۖ فَاذْكُرُوا
اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا صَوَافَّ ۖ فَإِذَا وَجَبَتْ جُنُوبُهَا فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا الْقَانِعَ وَالْمُعْتَرَّ
ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرْنَاهَا لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا
وَلَٰكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرَهَا لَكُمْ لِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا

هَدَاكُمْ ۖ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(22:25) *Surely (as for) those who disbelieved, and hinder (people) from Allah's way and from the Sacred Mosque which We have made equally for all people, the dweller therein and the visitor, and whoever shall incline therein to wrong unjustly, We will make him taste a painful chastisement.*

(22:26) *And when We assigned to Abraham the place of the House, saying: Do not associate with Me aught, and purify My House for those who go around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves.*

(22:27) *And proclaim among people the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path,*

(22:28) *That they may witness advantages for them and mention the name of Allah during stated days over what He has given them of herd animals. Then eat of them and feed the distressed one, the needy.*

(22:29) *Then let them accomplish their needful acts of shaving and cleansing, and let them fulfil their vows and let them go round the Ancient House.*

(22:30) *That (shall be so); and whoever respects the sacred ordinances of Allah, it is better for him with his Lord; and the cattle are made lawful for you, except that which is recited to you. Therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words,*

(22:31) *Being upright for Allah, not associating aught with Him; and whoever associates (others) with Allah, it is as though he had fallen from above. Then the birds snatch him away or the wind carries him off to a far-off place.*

(22:32) *That (shall be so); and whoever venerates the signs of Allah, this surely is (the outcome) of the piety of hearts.*

(22:33) *You have advantages in them till a fixed time; then their place of sacrifice is the Ancient House.*

(22:34) *And to every nation We appointed an act of devotion that they may mention the name of Allah on what He has given them of herd animals; so your Allah is One Allah, therefore to Him should you submit, and give good news to the humble,*

(22:35) *(To) those whose hearts tremble when Allah is mentioned, and*

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those who are patient over what afflicts them, and those who keep up prayer, and spend (benevolently) out of what We have given them.

(22:36) *And (as for) the camels, We have made them among the signs of the religion of Allah for you; for you therein is much good. Therefore mention the name of Allah on them as they stand in a row; then when they fall down eat of them and feed the poor man who is content and the beggar. Thus have We made them subservient to you, that you may be grateful.*

(22:37) *Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches Allah; instead, your piety reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient to you, that you may magnify Allah because He has guided you aright; and give good news to those who do good.*

Introduction

These verses talk about the polytheists blocking the believers' access to the Sacred Mosque and threaten them for their hindrance. Then they discuss the first legislation of pilgrimage to the Kaʿbah at the time of Abraham, and his task to declare this among the people, followed by a set of hajj rituals.

Commentary

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِإِلْحَادٍ بِظُلْمٍ نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(22:25) ***Surely (as for) those who disbelieved, and hinder*** **(yaṣuddūna)** ***(people) from Allah's way and from the Sacred Mosque which We have made equally*** **(sawāʾan)** ***for all people, the dweller*** **(al-ʿākif, from ʿūkūf)** ***therein and the visitor*** **(al-bādī)*—and whoever shall desire therein any violate*** **(ilḥād)** ***unjustly, We will make him taste a painful chastisement.***

Ṣadd means "to hinder, to prevent." *Sawāʾ* is an infinitive (that is, equality) that has the meaning of the subject here (that is, equal). *ʿŪkūf* in a place is "to reside and dwell there." *Bādī* is from the root *badw*, which means "to appear." It has been said that *bādī* here means "visitor"; that

is, one who enters the Sacred Mosque from outside. *Ilḥād* is "to bend or incline toward distortion."[1] It was originally used for a deformity in an animal's foot.

Those who disbelieve are the polytheists of Mecca. They rejected the Prophet when he was first appointed as a messenger in Mecca, before his migration [to Medina]. They used to stop people from accepting Islam, which is *Allah's way,* and they used to prevent the believers from entering the Sacred Mosque to circumambulate the Kaʿbah, to establish prayer, and to perform other rituals. *Yaṣuddūna* (hinder, in present tense) implies continuous hindrance. There is no grammatical problem with adding a present tense verb (*yaṣuddūna*) to a past tense one (*kafarū*: disbelieved). The implied meaning is: "Those who disbelieved in the past, and have been ever hindering the people from God's way and the believers from the Sacred Mosque…"

Given the above interpretation, *"the Sacred Mosque"* is added to *"Allah's way,"* and "hindering from the Sacred Mosque" means hindering the believers from performing their worship and rituals there. One of the implications and extensions of this hindrance is that they used to prevent believers from outside Mecca from entering Mecca for pilgrimage.

… which We have made equally for all people: This is an attribute of the Sacred Mosque. Based on the above explanation, "for all people" means "for all people's *worship*" not "for their *ownership*." What people own is the right to worship God there, and no one can stop others from doing so. This indicates that preventing and hindering people from the Sacred Mosque is an infringement on the people's rights (*ḥaqq al-nās*) and a wrongful inclination to injustice. Likewise, referring to this way [to the Sacred Mosque] as *Allah's way* shows that hindering people from this path is also an infringement on God's rights (*ḥaqq Allāh*).

This interpretation is confirmed by the next part of the verse: *equally for all people, the dweller therein and the visitor*. That is, the residents and the visitors are equal in terms of having a right to worship God in the Sacred Mosque. Of course, what is meant by "dwellers" here is "the residents of *Mecca*," but the verse refers to them as "the dwellers of the *Mosque*"—by using the word "therein"—because the meaning is understood. It could also be that they are referred to as the dwellers of the

1 *Ilḥād* in the Qur'an can best be translated as "violation."In contemporary Arabic it means atheism. (Trans.)

Mosque in the sense that they always attend the Mosque for worship.[1]

… and whoever shall desire* (yurid) *therein* (fīhi) *any violation* (bi-ilḥād) *unjustly* (bi-ẓulm), *We will make him taste a painful chastisement: This part of the verse outlines the punishment for wronging the people by violating their above mentioned right to attend the Sacred Mosque. Its implication is that it is unlawful to hinder others from entering the Mosque for worship. The object of *yurid* (to want, to incline) is omitted to include any possible kind of wrongful inclination. The letter *bāʾ* (lit. "by") in *bi-ilḥād* shows coverage (*mulābasah*), while in *bi-ẓulm* it shows *sababiyyah* (causality or instrumentality).[2] This last part of the verse in entirety is the predicate of the first part of the verse: *Surely (as for) those who disbelieve…*[3]

The meaning is: The disbelievers constantly prevent the people from God's way, which is the religion of Islam, and hinder the believers from the Sacred Mosque, which has been made a place of worship for all people without any difference between those who reside there and the visitors. We will make them taste a painful chastisement because they want to wrong people there unjustly, and the punishment of anyone who has such desire and inclination is to taste a painful chastisement.

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1 Using the word *ʿākif* for "dweller" could also be a subtle hint at the rite of *iʿtikāf* (retreat in a mosque) which was a common practice since the time of Prophet Abraham, as seen in verse 2:125. (Trans.)

2 That is: "Whoever desires to do anything there while being covered in violation out of injustice (or through unjust means), We will make him taste of a painful chastisement." Another possibility: Given two other similar usages of *ilḥād* in the Qur'an (7:180 and 41:40), it could be that *fīhi* (therein) does not indicate the place of *yurid* (desire, want), but it indicates the object of *ilhād* (violation). The meaning would be violation "against it," "with respect to it," or "in it." In this case, *fīhi bi-ilḥād* (which is equivalent to *bi-ilḥād fīhi*) would be the complement of *yurid*, and *bi-ẓulm* (unjustly) would be an interpretive qualifier. The implied meaning would be: "Whoever shall desire any unjust violation against it, We will make him taste of a painful chastisement." This is how Pickthall and Arberry have translated the verse. (Trans.)

3 The word "and" in "*and whoever shall desire…*" is apparently superfluous. However, it shows that what follows after it is added to an omitted part that is implied. The first part of the verse indicates a threat, but the actual threat is left out to emphasize its severity. Then it is added: "*and whoever shall desire…*" as a general rule that justifies the first part of the verse. (Trans.)

The exegetes have suggested many different views concerning the inflection (*iʿrāb*) of the words in this verse, but perhaps our interpretation above is more consonant with the context.

وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَنْ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿٢٦﴾

(22:26) ***And when*** **(idh)** ***We assigned*** **(bawwaʾnā)** ***to Abraham the place*** **(makān)** ***of the House, saying: Do not associate with Me aught, and purify My House for those who go around it and stand to pray*** **(al-qāʾimīn)** ***and bow and prostrate themselves*** **(al-rukkaʿ al-sujūd).**

When a place is used as the object of the verb *bawwaʾa*, it means that it is set a point of reference for someone to aim for or return to. *Makān* is "where something is positioned and rests." The "makān *of the House*" is the land where it is built. Based on the context, *al-qāʾimīn* (lit. "those who stand") means "those who stand *in worship and prayer*." *Rukkāʿ* is the plural of *rākiʿ* (one who bows), as *sujjad* is the plural of *sājid* (one who prostrates). Likewise, *sujūd* is the plural of *sājid*, as *rukūʿ* is the plural of *rākiʿ*.

The word *idh* (when) at the beginning of the verse refers to an omitted verb: *udhkur* (remember, or remind them of). It implies: "Remember the story when We assigned…." The verse reminds the reader of how the Kaʿbah was established as a place of worship for all people in order to show that hindering the believers from the Sacred Mosque cannot be anything but an unjust violation.

What is meant here is that God assigned the place of the House to Abraham as a point of reference *for worship*, not *a home to live in*. The same idea can be inferred from the command"*purify My House*,"where God ascribes the House to *Himself*. Surely this assignment was made through revelation (*waḥy*) to Abraham. Therefore, *We assigned to Abraham the place of the House* essentially means: "We revealed to Abraham to take this place as a point of reference to worship Me." In other words: "We revealed to him: aim this place to worship Me," which is equivalent to: "Worship Me in this place!"

The particle *an* (lit. "that," translated as "saying") before *do not associate with Me aught* clarifies that the verse is talking about God's speech and revelation to Abraham. Therefore, there is no need to assume an omitted verb like "We revealed" or "We said."

The above points also clarify that *do not associate with Me aught* does not forbid polytheism in its absolute sense. Of course, polytheism *is* absolutely forbidden, but what is meant here is a specific type of polytheism, given the context of the verse. It is about associating others with God while setting out for the House to worship God. More clearly, it forbids associating others in the rites of the hajj, such as offering sacrifices to them or including them in the statement "Here I come" (*labbayka*, *talbiyah*). The same [contextually specific interpretation] applies to the next part of the verse:

… purify* (ṭahhir, from taṭhīr) *My House for those who go around it and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves: *Taṭhīr* means "to remove impurity and defilement from something in order to return it to its original nature." God ascribes the House to Himself, saying *My House*, meaning "the House that is exclusively for My worship." In the sense that the House is a place of worship, its purification means keeping it clean and clear from corrupt acts and from impurities that defile one's worship. That would be polytheism and its expressions [that is, idols and images].

There are two possible meanings for *purify My House*: (1) Purify it of spiritual impurities in particular. This means that Abraham must legislate and teach people a way of worship that is completely clear from any taint or impurity of polytheism, as Abraham himself was commanded to such worship.(2) Purify it of all impurities, whether physical or spiritual. The context of the verse favors the first meaning. Therefore, commanding one "to remove spiritual impurities from a house of worship for servants who journey there to worship God" is equivalent to commanding him to establish and legislate an act of worship there that is purely for God's sake, without any taint of polytheism, so that they may worship God and not associate anyone with Him.

Hence, the implied meaning according to the context is: Remember when We revealed to Abraham the following: (1) to worship Me in this House of Mine by taking it as a point of reference for My worship; (2) to not associate anything else in My worship; and (3) to establish a custom of worship that is free from polytheism for My servants who aim for My House, including those who go around it, those who stand in prayer, and those who bow and prostrate themselves.

The verse suggests that the main worship of the travelers to this House is circumambulation, standing in prayer, bowing and prostration. There is also a subtle hint in the verse that bowing and prostration are very close

together, like two closely related things that cannot be separated from one another.[1]

Here are some other views suggested by the exegetes:

What is meant by the verb *bawwaʾnā* (We assigned as a point of settlement or reference) is that "We *told* him to settle there" (*qulnā tubawwiʾ*).

Bawwaʾnā means "We *taught* him to settle there" (*aʿlamnā*).

The particle *an* (lit. "that") before *do not associate with Me aught* is a particle that makes what follows it an infinitive (that is, it is *maṣdariyyah*).[2]

The particle *an* is an unstressed form of *anna* (indeed, surely).[3]

Ṭāʾifīn (those who circumambulate) are travelers from outside, while *qāʾimīn* (those who stand) are the residents of Mecca.

"Those who stand, bow and prostrate" all refer to those who perform the prayer (*muṣallūn*).

However, these are all unlikely interpretations.

وَأَذِّنْ فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالًا وَعَلَىٰ كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِنْ كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

(22:27) ***And proclaim*** **(adhdhin, from taʾdhīn)** ***among people the Pilgrimage*** **(al-ḥajj)*****: they will come to you on foot*** **(rijālan)** ***and on every lean camel*** **(ḍāmir)*****, coming from every*** **(kulli)** ***remote path*** **(fajjin ʿamīq).**

Taʾdhīn means "to proclaim something by raising one's voice." That is why it has been interpreted as "call." *Ḥajj* literally means *qaṣd* (to aim, to intend). It is the name of a particular ritual in the Islamic shariah—following its first legislation by Abraham—as it involves aiming for the Sacred House. *Rijāl* is the plural of *rājil* (on foot), which is the opposite of *rākib* (mounted). *Ḍāmir* is an adjective meaning "lean due to traveling." *Al-fajj al-ʿamīq* has been defined as "far and remote way."

… proclaim among people the Pilgrimage: That is, call out to people to aim for the House, or to perform the hajj. The conjunction "and" at the beginning of the verse links this command to: *do not associate with Me aught* (22:26). The addressee here is Abraham [as in the last verse]. Some

1 This is inferred from the lack of *wāw* (lit. "and") between *al-rukkaʿ* (those who bow) and *al-sujūd* (those who prostrate). (Trans.)

2 The implied meaning would be: We assigned to Abraham the place of the House, forbidding him from associating anything with Me. (Trans.)

3 The implied meaning would be: We assigned to Abraham the place of the House, that surely do not associate with Me aught. (Trans.)

have said that the addressee here is our Prophet Muḥammad, but this is unlikely given the context.

… they will come to you: This is the result of the previous command. That is, if you call out to them, then they will come to you on foot, on the back of every lean camel, coming from every remote path.[1] The term *kull* in such cases means "many," not "all."

لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَعْلُومَاتٍ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ ۖ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا الْبَائِسَ الْفَقِيرَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(22:28) ***That they may witness advantages for them and mention the name of Allah during known days over what He has given them of livestock. Then eat of them and feed the distressed one, the needy.***

The letter *lām* (lit. "that") at the beginning of the verse either explains the reason and justification (*taʿlīl*) for the previous command, or it indicates the goal and purpose (*ghāyah*)of that command. It connects to *they will come to you* in the previous verse, meaning: "they will come to you *in order to* witness advantages for them" (if *lām* is for *taʿlīl*); or "they will come to you *and thus* they will witness advantages for themselves" (if *lām* is for *ghāyah*). The word "advantages" is mentioned in an absolute way, unconditioned by "worldly" or "otherworldly."

There are two kinds of advantages in hajj:

(1) Worldly advantages and benefits, which support the social life of human beings, make life enjoyable, fulfill various needs, and remove different imperfections. These advantages are achieved by means of trade, politics, government, management, norms, customs, traditions, and different forms of cooperation and mutual support.

This way, different people and nations from all around the world can get together and know each other despite all their differences in race, color, customs and cultures. They will be a congregation of people who subscribe to the same message of truth, who worship the same god called *Allah*, and who turn in the same direction of God's Holy House: the Kaʿbah. Their bodies are brought together because of their spiritual unity, and they follow the same practices due to their religious unity. Thus they

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1 Another possibility is that *yaʾtūka* (they will come to you) means *li-yaʾtūka* (so that they may come to you). This possibility can be deduced from the next verse: *That they may witness advantages for them….* (Trans.)

may take what they needs from one another, and will mutually benefit from each other. One community will seek help from another in solving their problems, and will reciprocate their help to the best of their ability. This is how smaller communities will merge to form bigger ones, until they all form an extensive community with such strength and manpower that even solid mountains cannot resist. No power will overcome them no matter how strong. There is no means to solving problems of life like cooperation; there is no way to cooperation except agreement; and there is no agreement like religious agreement.

(2) Other worldly advantages and benefits, which are the ways by which one seeks nearness to God through acts of worship, whether through speech or action. The rites of hajj involve different types of worship such as turning toward God, forsaking the pleasures of life and daily occupations, enduring hardships in order to journey toward Him, circumambulating His House, performing the prayer, offering sacrifice, giving charity, and fasting.

As we have discussed before,[1] the rites of hajj, with all of the bits and pieces, resemble a full course of what happened with Abraham in his journey through the stages of monotheism, abstaining from polytheism, and being purely in God's service.

Therefore, when the people go to Abraham—that is, when they journey toward the House for pilgrimage—they witness all of these advantages, both worldly and otherworldly. When they witness these advantages, they cling to them, because human beings are intrinsically motivated by self-interest.

***… and mention the name of Allah during known days over what He has given them of livestock* (bahīmat al-anʿām):** Al-Rāghib says:

> *Bahīmah* refers to an animal in the sense that it cannot speak. There is some ambiguity (*ibhām*) in its sound. However, in terms of usage, it does not include predators or birds. That is why God says: *livestock* (bahīmat al-anʿām) *are made lawful to you* (5:1).

Naʿam specifically refers to camels, and its plural is *anʿām*. The camel was called *naʿam* because it was the biggest *niʿmah* (bounty, boon, blessing) to Arabs. However, in terms of usage, *anʿām* can refer to any group of camels, cattle and sheep, as long as it includes the camels.

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1 See volume 3, of the English translation, under verses 2:196-203. (Trans.)

Therefore, *bahīmat al-anʿām* includes all three kinds: camels, cows and sheep, the latter of which consists of sheep and goats. The addition of *anʿām* to *bahīmah* is an interpretative addition (*iḍāfah bayāniyyah*).[1]

… and mention the name of Allah: The conjunction "and" joins this with the first part of the verse: *That they may witness*. It implies: "and *so that* they may mention the name of ***Allah*** during known days…" The Imams have interpreted "known days" as Eid al-Aḍḥā and the three days afterwards (*ayyām al-tashrīq*).

… over what He has given them of livestock: Apparently, this links backs to: *mention the name of Allah*. "*Of livestock*" is an interpretation and exposition of "*what He has given them*." What is meant is to mention the name of God when they sacrifice an animal, as opposed to the polytheists who used to sacrifice animals in the name of their idols.

Other views: According to al-Zamakhsharī, *mention the name of Allah* is a metaphorical way (*kināyah*) of saying "offer sacrifice." This is unlikely because the verse is specifically concerned with the remembrance of God's name, whereas the primarily concern of a metaphor is the intended meaning, not what is uttered as a vehicle for that meaning. Others have suggested that the meaning is to remember God during the days of hajj in its absolute sense [not specifically at the time of sacrifice]. This is also against the apparent meaning of the verse.

… Then eat of them and feed the distressed one* (al-bāʾis)*, the needy: *Bāʾis* is derived from *buʾs*, meaning "intense difficulty and need." Here the verse involves two commands: one that is dispensational (*eat of them*) and one that is obligatory (*feed the distressed one, the needy*).

ثُمَّ لْيَقْضُوا تَفَثَهُمْ وَلْيُوفُوا نُذُورَهُمْ وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(22:29) ***Then let them accomplish their needful acts of shaving and cleansing* (tafathahum)*, and let them fulfil their vows and let them go round the Ancient House.***

Tafath means "untidiness, bodily dishevelment." The verse orders the pilgrims to remove the untidiness that they have acquired during their state of *iḥrām* by clipping their nails, shaving their hair, and similar acts.

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1 *Bahīmat al-anʿām* literally means "beasts of cattle" or "beasts of flocks." Interpretive addition means that the word *bahīmah* (beast) is interpreted and clarified by *anʿām* (cattle, flocks). (Trans.)

This hints at leaving the state of *iḥrām*.

… and let them fulfil their vows: This is to fulfill any outstanding vows or promises that they have made.

… and let them go round the Ancient House: This refers to *ṭawāf al-nisāʾ*, as interpreted by the Ahl al-Bayt. This is because exiting the state of *iḥrām* lifts the prohibition of all unlawful items of *iḥrām* except for women [that is, sexual activity], which is to be lifted by the last act in hajj: *ṭawāf al-nisāʾ*.

The Holy Kaʿbah is called "the Ancient House" due to its antiquity, for it was the first house that was built for God's worship, as God says: *Most surely the first house appointed for people is the one at Bekkah, blessed and a guidance for the nations* (3:96). This House was built about four thousand years ago, or over two thousand five hundred years before the revelation of these verses, and it has remained standing for all these years.

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعَظِّمْ حُرُمَاتِ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ ۗ وَأُحِلَّتْ لَكُمُ الْأَنْعَامُ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(22:30) ***That (shall be so)*****(dhālika)*****; and whoever respects the sacred ordinances* (ḥurumāt, plural of ḥurmah) *of Allah, it is better for him with his Lord; and the cattle are made lawful for you, except that which is recited to you. Therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols* (al-awthān) *and avoid false words* (al-zūr).

Ḥurmah is "a limit that must be maintained, and which is forbidden to break." *Awthān* is the plural of *wathan*, meaning "idol." *Zūr* is "to deviate from the truth." That is why it is used for lies and false statements.

What is meant by *dhālika* (lit. "that") at the beginning of the verse is "that is the case" or "that is true." In other words, what We said above is exactly what We legislated for Abraham and his descendants about the rituals of hajj such as *iḥrām*, circumambulation, prayer, sacrifice for God and avoiding polytheism.

… and whoever respects the sacred ordinances* (ḥurumāt) *of Allah, it is better for him with his Lord: This is a call to respect and honor God's *ḥurumāt*—meaning what He has forbidden—whether they are mentioned here or elsewhere. Respecting (*taʿẓīm*) these ordinances means not violating them and not crossing God's sacred limits.

The context of the verse suggests that this sentence is a preparation and

preliminary to what follows in the verse: *and livestock are made lawful for you, except that which is told to you*. What the two parts convey together is that even though God has provided livestock as lawful sustenance for His servants, they involve some divine prohibition, as inferred from: *except that which is recited to you*.

… and the cattle are made lawful for you, except that which is recited* (yutlā) *to you. Therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols* (min al-awthān)*and avoid false words: *Yutlā* (recite, in present tense) suggests continual and repeated recitation. This is indeed true, because unlawful foods were outlined several times before the revelation of this chapter: once in Chapter 6 (al-Anʿām), then in Chapter 16 (al-Naḥl)—which were both revealed in Mecca—and then again in Chapter 2 (al-Baqarah)—which was revealed six months after the Prophet's migration to Medina, according to historical accounts. Some exegetes have suggested that this verse also refers to verse 5:3 [which was revealed later on, just before the Prophet's death], but we cannot maintain this because there is no sign that *yutlā* also includes future recitations.

The verses that discuss unlawful foods include several items such as carrion, blood, pork, and what has been offered to other than God. However, given the context of this verse and its previous and subsequent verses, what is of particular concern here is animals that are offered to some other god. At the time of revelation of Qur'an, the polytheists used to perform the pilgrimage, which was the only tradition that they had retained from Abraham's faith. However, in order to seek nearness to God they would refer to the idols that they had set up on the Kaʿbah, on Mounts Ṣafā and Marwah, and in Minā. They used to proclaim the names of these idols upon slaughtering animals. Hence, the verse primarily forbids calling the names of idols at the time of offering, although carrion, blood and pork are also unlawful to eat.[1]

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1 These verses have repeatedly emphasized the importance of mentioning God's name at the time of slaughtering animals (in verses 28, 30, 34 and 36). In addition to being a stand against the common practice of the polytheists at the time, this emphasis shows the importance of this condition in slaughtering animals. It is a consideration that by nature differs from other considerations like health benefits or causing less pain to the animal. This is according to Islam's monotheistic cosmology, which necessitates that no one can take the life of a living creature except by the permission of its Creator and in His name. (Trans.)

The above interpretation is supported by the last part of the verse: *therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words*. "Avoiding the idols" and "avoiding false words" are examples and instances of respecting the sacred ordinances of God. This is why they are linked to the first part of the verse by "therefore" (the letter *fāʾ* in *fa-ijtanibū*, which indicates *tafrīʿ*: consequence and conclusion). The reason why the verse explicitly mentions these two ordinances among all other ordinances is that these verses are about the hajj, and these two ordinances were current and applicable problems in hajj at that time. It was common practice among the polytheists to seek nearness to the idols by slaughtering their offerings in the names of their idols.

The above points show that *avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words* is a general prohibition against serving the idols and against false words that are uttered as a means for seeking nearness to them in hajj. So "*false words*" specifically concerns the polytheistic custom of proclaiming the names of the idols over their offerings. It should thus be clear how this last part of the verse is a consequent of the first part, linked by "therefore" (the letter *fāʾ*).

The object of prohibition in this verse is "uncleanness." Instead of saying, "avoid the idols," it says, *avoid the uncleanness* and then adds *of the idols*. This implies the *reason* behind the prohibition: you must avoid the idols *because* they are unclean. Moreover, one would naturally prohibit an *action*, not an *object*. Yet, the verse has done otherwise: instead of saying, "avoid worshiping idols, touching idols, turning to idols" or something similar, it simply says, *avoid the idols*. This is a way of stressing the importance of this prohibition.[1]

Given the above explanation,the particle *min* ("of" in "*the uncleanness of the idols*") is an interpretative particle (*bayāniyyah*).[2] Other exegetes have suggested:

The particle *min* here means "from" (*ibtidāʾiyyah*, indicating where something comes from). The meaning would be: "Avoid the uncleanness that emerges from the idols," which would refer to worshiping them.

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1 It is also a way of including all of the possible actions that can be classified as "uncleanness of the idols." (Trans.)

2 The particle *min* in this case would mean "that is, which is, in other words." The meaning would be: "Avoid the uncleanness—meaning the idols." (Trans.)

The particle *min* here marks division and partition (*tabʿīḍ*). The meaning would be: "Avoid the uncleanness that is one aspect of the idols," which would again be their aspect of being worshiping.

However, it is easy to see that both of these interpretations are contrived and make the verse less consistent in meaning.

حُنَفَاءَ لِلَّهِ غَيْرَ مُشْرِكِينَ بِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَكَأَنَّمَا خَرَّ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتَخْطَفُهُ الطَّيْرُ أَوْ تَهْوِي بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي مَكَانٍ سَحِيقٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(22:31) ***Being upright* (ḥunafāʾ) *for Allah, not associating aught with Him; and whoever associates (others)with Allah, it is as though he had fallen from above. Then the birds snatch him away or the wind carries him off to a far-off place.***

Ḥunafāʾ is the plural of *ḥanīf*, meaning "one who inclines from the sides toward the center." Being *ḥunafāʾ* for God means inclining away from others—that is, from other gods—toward God. Therefore, it is the same as: *not associating aught with Him*.

These two phrases—*Being upright for Allah* and *not associating aught with Him*—describe the state and condition (*ḥāl*) that the subject must have in following the prohibitions in the previous verse. That is: "Avoid trying to come close the idols and offering sacrifice in their names, *while* you incline toward God and away from other gods, and *while* you are not associating anything with Him in your pilgrimage." This would relate to how the polytheists used to say their *labbayka*: "Here I come; there is no partner for You except a partner that is Yours: You own him and what he owns."

… and whoever associates (others) with Allah, it is as though he had fallen from above. Then the birds snatch him away* (fa-takhṭafuhu)*: *Takhṭafuhu* means "to snatch or grab something quickly." The image of one who falls from the sky and is snatched by the birds resembles one who associates others with God and thus falls from the highest degrees of humanity to the lowest pits of error, where he is hunted and snatched by the Devil.

… or the wind carries him off to a far-off* (saḥīq) *place: *Saḥīq* means "far away." This is another similitude that reflects the distance and separation that is caused by associating others with God.

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ يُعَظِّمْ شَعَائِرَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّهَا مِنْ تَقْوَى الْقُلُوبِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(22:32) ***That (shall be so)*****(dhālika)*****; and whoever venerates the signs (shaʿāʾir) of Allah, this surely is (the outcome) of the piety of hearts.**

Dhālika (lit. "that is") at the beginning of the verse is the predicate of an omitted subject. The implied meaning is: "The matter is that which We said." *Shaʿāʾir* is the plural of *shaʿīrah*, meaning *ʿalāmah* (sign, mark, token, emblem). God's *shaʿāʾir* are the signs that He has set up for His obedience and worship. For example He says: *Surely Ṣafā and Marwah are among the signs appointed by Allah* (2:158); *and (as for) camels, We have made them among the signs of the religion of Allah for you* (22:36).

In this verse, however, the "signs of God" (*shaʿāʾir Allāh*) are specifically the camels that were driven toward Mecca, with a cut on the right side of their humps to show they were designated for offering. This is how the Ahl al-Bayt have interpreted the verse. It also complies with what follows in the next verses: *you have advantages in them…* (22:33), and: *and(as for) the camels, We have made them among the signs…* (22:36). Some exegetes have suggested that "God's signs" in this verse include *all* apparent signs and rituals that mark obeisance of God. This interpretation, however, is not supported by the context of these verses.[1]

… this* (fa-innahā) *surely is (the outcome) of the piety* (taqwā) *of hearts: That is, respecting and honoring the signs of God is a result of piety. "This" (*innahā*) refers to "respecting the signs" (*taʿẓīm al-shaʿāʾir*), which is understood from the first part of the verse. Yet, it is as if the term *taʿẓīm* (respect, which is masculine) has been dropped in this ascription, because the pronoun *innahā* only matches *al-shaʿāʾir* (because both are feminine).

Taqwā is "to avoid and abstain from God's wrath by keeping away from what He has forbidden." Ascribing *taqwā* (piety) to the hearts indicates that *taqwā* is a spiritual reality that pertains to the heart (that is, the soul). *Taqwā* is not about the outward acts in terms of movements and postures, because the same movements and postures can occur as either obedience or disobedience. For example: (1) marriage and adultery both involve touch; (2) a person might be killed either as just punishment (*qiṣāṣ*) or unjustly; and (3) one may pray in order to either seek nearness to God or to show off. Likewise, *taqwā* is not just a set of mental labels

1 A middle ground is to say that given its context, the verse has the specific meaning suggested by the author, but taken by itself it can have a more general meaning. (Trans.)

and abstract concepts that are derived from acts, such as"doing good" and "obeying God."

لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ثُمَّ مَحِلُّهَا إِلَى الْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ ﴿٣٣﴾

(22:33) ***You have advantages in them*** **(fīhā)** ***till a fixed time; then their place of sacrifice*** **(maḥilluhā)** ***is the Ancient House.***

Maḥill is a noun of a time (*ism zam*ān), meaning "when the end of some period is reached, when an appointed time arrives." The pronoun "them" (*fīhā*) refers to "the signs of God" (*shaʿāʾir Allāh*, in the previous verse).

Assuming that the "signs of God" refers to sacrificial camels [or sacrificial animals in general], the meaning would be: There are surely advantages and benefits for you in these signs—meaning the camels—such as riding on their backs and drinking their milk as you need it, until a fixed time, which is the time of their slaughter. Then their *maḥill*, meaning the time of their slaughter, will be upon reaching the Ancient House.[1]

The verse would thus be equivalent to: *an offering to be brought to the Kaʿbah* (5:95). This is according to Ahl al-Bayt's interpretation.

Alternatively, the "signs of God" could mean all rituals of hajj. Then, as the exegetes have pointed out, "advantages" would refer to financial gains from trade, which continue until a fixed time. Then the final place and destination of these rituals will be at the Ancient House, as the last ritual of the hajj is circumambulating God's House.

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا لِيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا رَزَقَهُمْ مِنْ بَهِيمَةِ الْأَنْعَامِ ۗ فَإِلَٰهُكُمْ إِلَٰهٌ وَاحِدٌ فَلَهُ أَسْلِمُوا ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُخْبِتِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(22:34) ***And to every nation We appointed an act of devotion*** **(mansakan)** ***that they may mention the name of Allah on what He has given them of livestock; so your Allah is One Allah, therefore to Him should you submit, and give good news to the humble.***

Mansak can be a verbal noun, or a noun indicating time and place

1 Apparently the author has interpreted *maḥill* as a temporal noun in consistency with "*till a fixed time*" in the first part of the verse. It could also be that *maḥill* is a locative noun or name of place, meaning "the place of settlement" or "the place of slaughter," in consistency with the end of the verse: *toward the Ancient House*. The overall meaning, however, would be the same. (Trans.)

(*ism zamān* and *ism makān*). Based on the following part of the verse (*that they may mention the name of Allah*), it seems that *mansak* here is a verbal noun, meaning "the act of worship that consists of sacrifice and offering."

The meaning is: "To every nation"—that is, people of the previous religions—"We appointed an act of devotion in the form of offering sacrifices so that they may remember God's name over the animals that He has provided for them." In other words: "O followers of Abraham [that is, O Muslims]! You are not the first nation for whom sacrifice and offering has been prescribed, for indeed We also prescribed this act for those who came before you."

… so your Allah is One Allah, therefore to Him should you submit: Given that God is the One Who prescribed the same act for you and for those before you, it follows that you and the previous nations have the same God. Thus, you must submit and surrender to Him by acting only for Him, and by not seeking proximity to other gods when you offer a sacrifice. The letter *fāʾ* (therefore) in *therefore to Him should you submit* shows that this statement is a consequence and conclusion that is drawn from the clause, *your Allah is One Allah*.

… and give good news to the humble: This is a subtle hint that one who submits to God in hajj with sincerity is among the humble ones, who are defined in the next verse.

الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَالصَّابِرِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَهُمْ وَالْمُقِيمِي الصَّلَاةِ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(22:35) ***(To) those whose hearts tremble when Allah is mentioned, and those who are patient over what afflicts them, and those who keep up prayer, and spend (benevolently) out of what We have given them.***

There is a clear connection between one who performs the hajj in submission to his Lord and the four qualities that are mentioned in this verse: (1) trembling; (2) patience; (3) establishing prayer; and (4) giving charity out of what God has provided a person.

وَالْبُدْنَ جَعَلْنَاهَا لَكُمْ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ فِيهَا خَيْرٌ ۖ فَاذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا صَوَافَّ ۖ فَإِذَا وَجَبَتْ جُنُوبُهَا فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا الْقَانِعَ وَالْمُعْتَرَّ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرْنَاهَا لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(22:36) ***And (as for) the camels* (al-budn)*, We have made them among the signs of the religion of Allah for you; for you therein is much good. Therefore mention the name of Allah on them as they stand in a row; then when they fall on their flanks eat of them and feed the poor man who is content and the beggar. Thus have We made them subservient to you, that you may be grateful.***

Budn is the plural of *badanah*, meaning "fat and heavy camels." Based on the context of these verses, these camels are among the signs of God (*shaʿāʾir Allāh*) because they are dedicated for offering.

… Therefore mention the name of Allah on them as they stand in a row* (ṣawāff)*: *Ṣawāff* is the plural of *ṣāffah*, which means "standing in a line, with front and back feet aligned, forelegs tied."

… then when they fall on their flanks* (wajabat junūbuhā)*, eat of them and feed the poor man who is content (al-qāniʿ) and the beggar* (al-muʿtarr)*; thus have We made them subservient to you, that you may be grateful: *Wujūb* here means "to fall." *Wajabat al-shams* means that "the sun went down and disappeared." *Junūb* is the plural of *janb*, meaning "side." *Wajabat junūbuhā* means "when they fall down on their side," which is a way of saying when they die. The command to *eat of them* indicates that it is *permissible* to eat their meat [not that it is *obligatory*]. *Qāniʿ* is "a poor person who is content with whatever he is given," including those who ask and those who do not. *Muʿtarr* is "a poor person who goes begging and asking for help." The meaning of the verse is clear.

لَنْ يَنَالَ اللَّهَ لُحُومُهَا وَلَا دِمَاؤُهَا وَلَٰكِنْ يَنَالُهُ التَّقْوَىٰ مِنْكُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ سَخَّرَهَا
لَكُمْ لِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(22:37) ***Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches Allah; instead, your piety reaches Him. Thus has He made them subservient to you, that you may magnify Allah because He has guided you aright; and give good news to those who do good.***

This verse clarifies a potential misconception. A simple-minded person might be under the impression that there is some benefit to God in these offerings and their meat and blood. The verse refutes this by saying: none of their flesh or blood reaches God because He is free from physical properties and all need. It is only *taqwā* (self-restraint, piety) that reaches Him *spiritually*, meaning that the possessors of *taqwā* get closer to God

because of having this quality.

Alternatively, the verse could be an answer to another potential question: if God is above having a body, does not have any need or imperfection, and does not benefit from the meat or blood of offerings, then what is the point of these offerings? The verse confirms that indeed God is needless, but these sacrifices bring about a spiritual quality in those who offer them and bring them closer to God. This spiritual quality has the capacity of reaching God, meaning that it rises toward Him, brings its possessor closer to Him, and leaves no veil obstructing the person from God.

… Thus has He made them subservient to you, that you may magnify* (li-tukabbirū, from takbīr) *Allah because He has guided you aright: The explicit meaning of *takbīr* is "to describe God as great and magnificent." "Guidance" here means God's guidance of His servants toward worshiping and serving Him. The meaning is: He has made these animals subservient to you so that you may be guided to worship Him and get closer to Him by offering these subservient animals in sacrifice. Thus, you must remember Him with glory and magnificence because of this guidance.

Some exegetes have suggested that *takbīr* means "to know and recognize that God is magnificent," and "guidance" means how people are guided to subdue these animals. The meaning would be: These animals have been put under your control so you may recognize God's magnificence—because He has guided you to tame them.

The first interpretation, however, is more appropriate and consonant with the context of the verse. According to this interpretation, God has placed these animals under the control of His servants so that they can get closer to God by slaughtering the animals. Thus, God must be praised (through *takbīr*) for guiding His servants to this act of worship which allows them to earn God's pleasure and reward. But there is no clear connection between the context here and the idea that God has guided people to tame animals in general.

***… and give good news to those who do good* (al-muḥsinīn, from iḥsān):** There are two possible meanings for *iḥsān*: (1) doing good deeds in general; or (2) giving charity in God's way in particular.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 22:25 (*and whoever shall desire therein any violation unjustly*) Ibn ʿAbbās said: This verse was revealed about

ʿAbd-Allāh b. Anīs. The Messenger of God sent him on a mission with two other men: one of the Muhājirīn (Meccan Immigrants) and one of the Anṣār (Medinite Supporters). Along the way, these men got into a debate and started taking pride in their ancestors, whereuponʿAbd-Allāh b. Anīs became angry and killed the man from the Anṣār. Then he became an apostate and escaped to Mecca. Thus this verse was revealed about him: *And whoever shall desire therein any violation unjustly, We will make him taste a painful chastisement* (22:36), meaning one who inclines away from Islam and then takes refuge in the sanctuary of Mecca (*ḥaram*).[1]

Author's comment: This account does not match the thread and context of the verse. It fails to connect the last part of the verse to its first part, unlike our interpretation above.

(2) Concerning *Surely (as for) those who disbelieve… and the visitor* (22:25) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This verse was revealed about the Quraysh [a Meccan tribe] when they hindered the Messenger of God from Mecca.

(3) Concerning *Made equally for all people, the dweller therein and the visitor* (22:25) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It says that the people of Mecca and those who come from elsewhere are equal; no one has the right to prevent others from entering and staying in the *ḥaram*.

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq recited verse 22:25 (*made equally for all people, the dweller therein and the visitor*) and said: No house in Mecca used to have a door. The first person to hang two door panels upon his entrance was Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān. However, no one should prevent pilgrims from the houses and resting areas there.[2]

Author's comment: This idea is found in many narrations, although the legal ruling should be discussed in jurisprudence.

(5) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about verse 22:25 (*and whoever shall desire therein any violation unjustly*). He said: Every injustice is *ilḥād* (infidelity),[3] including hitting a servant (*khādim*) who has

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Abī al-ʿAlāʾ.

3 Apparently *ilḥād* in these narrations means its commonly used meaning of

not done anything wrong.[1]

(6) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about verse 22:25 (*and whoever shall desire therein any violation unjustly, We will make him taste a painful chastisement*). He said: When one wrongs himself, steals, wrongs others, or does any form of injustice whatsoever in Mecca, then it would be *ilḥād*. That is why residing in the vicinity of the *ḥaram* has been avoided [by the Infallibles and/or their Companions].[2]

Author's comment: This narration is also reported in *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of al-Ṣabāḥ, with a slightly different ending: "That is why residing in the vicinity of the *ḥaram* has been prohibited." There are also other narrations similar to this one and the one before [about the inclusive definition of *ilḥād*].

(7) Al-Rabīʿ b. Khuthaym[3] says: Once I saw Imam al-Ṣādiq being taken around the Kaʿbah on a litter while he was severely ill. Whenever he reached the Yemeni Corner (al-Rukn al-Yamānī), he would order the carriers to put him down on the ground. Then he would stretch his hand out of the litter's opening and touch the ground. Then he would say, "Lift me up [again]."

When I saw him repeating this in every round, I told him, "May I be sacrificed for you, O son of Messenger of God! You are taking it hard on yourself." He replied, "I have heard that God says: *that they may witness advantages for them* (22:28)."

I asked, "Is this about worldly or otherworldly advantages?" He answered, "Both."[4]

(8) Concerning the same verse (22:28), *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: It has been said that this verse is about otherworldly advantages, meaning pardon and forgiveness. This has been narrated from Imam

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"disbelief and heresy," not its lexical meaning discussed above. (Trans.)

1 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Muʿāwiyah [b. ʿAmmār].

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abu al-Ṣabāḥ al-Kinānī.

3 This is not the same Rabīʿ b. Khuthaym that was one of the eight famous ascetics, for they passed away long before Imam al-Ṣādiq. See Majlisī, *Mirʾāt al-uqūl* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1404/1984), 18:47. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

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al-Ṣādiq.

Author's comment: Asserting a specific type of advantage does not contradict a more general and inclusive meaning, as seen in the previous narration [by al-Rabīʿ b. Khuthaym].

(9) Imam al-Riḍā wrote in response to Muḥammad b. Sinān: The wisdom behind hajj is visiting God as a guest, seeking abundance [of reward or blessing], coming out of all sins, repenting from all that has happened in the past, and starting a new future. It also involves spending money, tiring the body, restraining the body from lusts and pleasures, seeking nearness to God through worship, humility, servility, abasement, and a continuous experience of alternating periods of heat, cold, security and fear. These are means of showing hope and fear toward God, and they involve benefits for all people. Among these benefits are being freed from hard-heartedness, recklessness, and heedlessness [of God's remembrance]. It also makes one cut his hopes and desires [from other-than-God], renew the rights [of God upon him], and restrain his soul from vices. It benefits everyone, whether they are in the east or the west, on the land or sea, including those who perform the pilgrimage and those who do not, such as merchants, importers, sellers, buyers, shoppers and beggars. It serves the needs of those living nearby and those who are in places where people can gather. It is thus *that they may witness advantages for them* (22:28).[1]

Author's comment: A similar tradition is narrated from the Imam on the authority of al-Faḍl b. Shādhān.

(10) Concerning verse 22:28 (*and mention the name of Allah during stated days*) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: These are the days of *tashrīq* (the 10-13th of the month of Dhū al-Ḥijjah).[2]

Author's comment: Other narrations from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq also convey the same meaning. But some opposing narrations identify the "stated days" as the first ten days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah. Other

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1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, under a series of questions that Muḥammd b. Sinān asked from the Imam.

2 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣabāḥ al-Kinānī.

narrations identify the "numbered days" (*ayyām maʿdūdāt*, 2:203) as the first ten days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, and the "stated days" (*ayyām maʿlūmāt*, 22:28) as the days of *tashrīq*. The verse itself is more compliant with the stated days being the days of *tashrīq*.[1]

(11) Concerning *Then let them accomplish their needful acts of shaving and cleansing* (tafathahum) (22:29) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This is about removing hair and what is in the skin [of impurities].[2]

(12) Imam al-Riḍā said: *Tafath* is cutting the nails, cleaning off filth, and taking off the *iḥrām* clothes.[3]

(13) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about *let them go round the Ancient House* (al-bayt al-ʿatīq) (22:29). He said: It is *ṭawāf al-nisāʾ*.[4]

Author's comment: There are more narrations from the Infallibles in line with the last three.

(14) Abān says: I asked Imam al-Bāqir, "Why has God called His House *ʿatīq* (lit. 'free')?" He replied, "It is a house that is free from the ownership of people. It does not belong to anyone."[5]

(15) In a narration describing the drowning of Noah's people, Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The House has been called *ʿatīq* because it was saved from drowning.[6]

(16) ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Zubayr narrates from the Messenger of God: God has called His House *al-ʿatīq* because He has freed it from oppressors. No oppressor has ever dominated it.[7]

Author's comment: This narration is not confirmed by history. In

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1 This is because the sacrificial animals are actually slaughtered and distributed during these days. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Ṣabāḥ al-Kinānī.

3 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, on the authority of al-Bazanṭī.

4 *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥammād al-Nāb.

5 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

6 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

7 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī's *Tarīkh*, al-Tirmidhī (who has classified it as *ḥasan* [fair, in terms of its authenticity]), Ibn al-Jarīr, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

fact, ʿAbd-Allāh b. al-Zubayr himself demolished the House and reconstructed it differently. Later, al-Ḥuṣayn b. Numayr destroyed it by the order of Yazīd, then al-Ḥajjāj by the order of ʿAbd al-Malik, and then the Qarāmiṭah.[1] It is possible, however, that the Prophet meant what had happened to the House *before* his time. We should also add that the hadith before it [about drowning] is yet to be verified [historically, or in terms of authenticity].

(17) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The Ḥijr [of Ismāʿīl] is a part of the House, because the Messenger of God included it in his circumambulation, and God says: *and let them go round the Ancient House* (22:29).[2]

Author's comment: There are also some narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt that confirm this.

(18) The Prophet said: O sons of ʿAbd-i Manāf![3] Do not hinder anyone from circumambulating this House and from praying whenever they like during the night or the day.[4]

(19) Concerning *Therefore avoid the uncleanness of the idols* (22:30) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: Our transmitters [that is, Shia narrators] have narrated that this includes chess, backgammon and other types of gambling.

(20) Concerning *and avoid false words* it says: Our transmitters have narrated that this includes *ghināʾ* (music, singing) and other types of speech that make one heedless of God.

(21) The Messenger of God said in a sermon: "O people! False testimony is equivalent to associating partners with God." Then he recited: *Avoid the uncleanness of the idols and avoid false words* (22:30).[5]

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1 See the author's discussion on the history of the Kaʿbah under verses 3:96-97, in volume 6, pp. 246ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Sufyān b. ʿUyaynah, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*.

3 This is an ancestor of the Prophet, whose descendants resided in and were an influential tribe in Mecca. (Trans.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah and al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), on the authority of Jubayr b. Muṭʿim.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ayman b. Khuraym.

Author's comment: This hadith is also reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ayman.

(22) Concerning verse 22:33 (*You have advantages in them till a fixed time*), Imam al-Ṣādiq said: If one needs the animal's back, then he can ride on its back, but he should not burden it. If one he needs its milk, then he can milk it, but he should not exhaust its milk.[1]

(23) ᶜAlī [b. Abī Ṭālib] said: One should ride his camel gently.[2]

Author's comment: A similar hadith is narrated from the Prophet, on the authority of Jābir.

(24) Concerning *therefore to Him should you submit, and give good news to the humble* (al-mukhbitīn) (22:34) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Al-mukhbitīn* means those who worship [in humbleness].

(25) Concerning verse *therefore mention the name of Allah on them as they stand in a row* (22:36) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "This is when they [the camels] stand with their feet aligned and their toes tied to their knees, ready to be slaughtered."

(26) Concerning *then when they fall on their flanks* (wajabat junūbuhā) (22:36) he said: "This is when they fall down onto the ground."[3]

(27) Concerning *then when they fall on their flanks* (wajabat junūbuhā) (22:36) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "This is when they fall down onto the ground."

(28) Concerning *eat of them and feed the poor man who is content* (al-qāniᶜ) *and the beggar* (al-muᶜtarr) (22:36) he said, "*Qānīᶜ* (content) is one who is content with what you give him, is not offended, does not frown, and does not turn his face away in rage. *Muᶜtarr* (a beggar) is one who passes by you so that you may feed him."[4]

(29) Sayf al-Tammār narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq: Saᶜīd b. ᶜAbd al-Malik met my father in hajj and told him, "I have brought an animal for sacrifice. What should I do with it?" He replied, "Give

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abu al-Ṣabāḥ al-Kinānī.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Sinān.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī ᶜAbd-Allāh.

one-third of it to your family, one-third to the *qāniʿ*, and one-third to the *miskīn*."

Then Sayf asked, "Does *miskīn* mean beggar (*sāʾil*)?" The Imam said, "Yes, and the *qāniʿ* is the one who is content with even one piece of meat that you give him, let alone more. Also,*muʿtarr* is one who passes by you without asking."[1]

Author's comment: There are numerous traditions in this regard from the Imams. We only narrated a sample.

(30) *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ* says: It has been narrated that the people of the pre-Islamic era (during the Age of Ignorance) used to spatter the Kaʿbah with the offering blood. So when the Muslims went to hajj, they also wanted to do the same. Thus it was revealed: *Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches Allah* (22:37).

Author's comment: A similar account is reported from Ibn ʿAbbās in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh.

(31) Concerning verse 22:37 (*that you may magnify Allah because He has guided you*) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This is about doing *takbīr* in prayers during the days of *tashrīq* (10-13th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah). In Minā, it should be recited after prayer for the next 15 prayers [from the noon prayer of the 10th until the morning prayer on the 13th], and in other cities it should be recited after prayer for the next 10 prayers [until the morning prayer on the 12th].

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1 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*.

Verses 38-57

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدَافِعُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ خَوَّانٍ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٨﴾ أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ
يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ
بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ۗ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهُدِّمَتْ
صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ۗ وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ
يَنْصُرُهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤٠﴾ الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ
وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤١﴾ وَإِنْ
يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَعَادٌ وَثَمُودُ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَقَوْمُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَقَوْمُ لُوطٍ
﴿٤٣﴾ وَأَصْحَابُ مَدْيَنَ ۖ وَكُذِّبَ مُوسَىٰ فَأَمْلَيْتُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُهُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ
نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٤﴾ فَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ فَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا وَبِئْرٍ
مُعَطَّلَةٍ وَقَصْرٍ مَشِيدٍ ﴿٤٥﴾ أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا
أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا ۖ فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَٰكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي
الصُّدُورِ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ
رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَمْلَيْتُ لَهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ ثُمَّ
أَخَذْتُهَا وَإِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٨﴾ قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا أَنَا لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٤٩﴾ فَالَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا
مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٥١﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا
نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّىٰ أَلْقَى الشَّيْطَانُ فِي أُمْنِيَّتِهِ فَيَنْسَخُ اللَّهُ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ ثُمَّ
يُحْكِمُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٢﴾ لِيَجْعَلَ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ
فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾ وَلِيَعْلَمَ

الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَيُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ فَتُخْبِتَ لَهُ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهَادِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَلَا يَزَالُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِنْهُ حَتَّىٰ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمٍ عَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٥﴾ الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

(22:38) *Surely Allah will defend those who believe; surely Allah does not love any one who is unfaithful, ungrateful.*

(22:39) *Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and most surely Allah is able to assist them;*

(22:40) *Those who have been expelled from their homes without just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And had Allah not repelled some people by others, certainly, many cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is often remembered would have been destroyed; and surely Allah will help the one who helps His cause; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.*

(22:41) *Those who, should We establish them in the land, will keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and enjoin good and forbid evil; and Allah's is the end of affairs.*

(22:42) *And if they reject you, then already before you did the people of Nuh and Ad and Thamud reject (prophets).*

(22:43) *And the people of Ibrahim and the people of Lut,*

(22:44) *As well as those of Madyan, and Musa (too) was rejected, but I gave respite to the unbelievers, then did I overtake them, so how (severe) was My disapproval.*

(22:45) *So how many a town did We destroy while it was unjust, so it fell down upon its roofs, and (how many a) deserted well and palace raised high.*

(22:46) *Have they not travelled in the land so that they would have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.*

(22:47) *And they ask you to hasten on the punishment, and Allah will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you count.*

(22:48) *And how many a town did I give respite to while it was unjust; then I overtook it; and to Me is the return.*

(22:49) *Say: O people! I am only a plain warner to you.*

(22:50) *Then (as for) those who believe and do good, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable sustenance.*

(22:51) *And (as for) those who strive to oppose Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the flaming fire.*

(22:52) *And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet, but when he desired, the Satan made a suggestion respecting his desire; but Allah annuls that which the Satan casts; then does Allah establish His signs, and Allah is Knowing, Wise,*

(22:53) *So that He may make what the Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard; and most surely the unjust are in a great opposition,*

(22:54) *And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so they may believe in it and their hearts may be lowly before it; and most surely Allah is the Guide of those who believe onto a right path.*

(22:55) *And those who disbelieve shall not cease to be in doubt concerning it until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes on them the chastisement of a destructive day.*

(22:56) *The kingdom on that day shall be Allah's; He will judge between them; so those who believe and do good will be in gardens of bliss.*

(22:57) *And (as for) those who disbelieve in and reject Our signs, these it is who shall have a disgraceful chastisement.*

Introduction

It is said that these were the first verses that were revealed concerning jihad, granting the believers permission to wage war. For a long time, the Muslims used to ask the Prophet for permission to fight back against the polytheists, but the Prophet's response was, "I have not received any order to fight." When he was in Mecca, the believers would come to him every day with beaten bodies and broken heads because of being tortured and persecuted. They would complain to him about what the oppressive

polytheists of Mecca were putting them through. In return the Prophet used to console them and urge them to be patient and to have hope that relief shall soon come. This was the case until these verses were revealed, where God says: *Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made…* (22:39).

As mentioned before, this was the first verse that was revealed about jihad. Some exegetes have said that the first verse concerning jihad was: *And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you…* (2:190). Others have said: *Surely Allah has bought of the believers their persons and their property…* (9:111).

It makes more sense that the current verses in Chapter 22 were revealed first, because: (1)they involve explicit permission; (2) this permission is accompanied by implicit and explicit promises of victory that fortify, prepare and motivate the believers, strengthen their hearts, and make their feet firm; and (3)they mention what God did to the unjust nations in the past. All of these points are characteristics of the first legislation and declarations of a set of important laws, especially jihad, which is based on sacrifice and selflessness. Indeed, jihad is the hardest and most difficult social responsibility in Islam, yet the most effective law in keeping the Muslim nation on its feet. The elaboration and awareness seen in these verses is most compliant with the first announcement of such a significant law.

This announcement starts off by stating that God is the Guardian and Defender of the believers. The following verses grant them permission to fight and say that they have been oppressed. Combat is what protects and maintains righteous societies, and the Muslims are righteous, for they have formed a society where they to attend righteous deeds. The verses then talk about how God treated the previous unjust societies, and that He will overtake the current oppressors as He overtook those who were before.

Commentary

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدَافِعُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ خَوَّانٍ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(22:38) ***Surely Allah will defend*** **(yudāfiʿu, from mudāfaʿah)** ***those who believe; surely Allah does not love any one who is unfaithful*** **(khawwān),** ***ungrateful*** **(kafūr).**

Mudāfaʿah is an exaggerated form of *dafʿ* (to protect, to deflect,

tothrust). *Khawwān* is one who is characterized by an exaggerated degree of *khiyānah* (disloyalty, treachery, breach). Likewise, *kafūr* is one who is characterized by an exaggerated degree of *kufrān* (ingratitude, ungratefulness). Since these verses involve the first legislation of jihad, they initially corresponded to Muslims at the time of revelation. However, the specific instance of revelation does not limit the breadth of the verse. Hence, "*those who believe*" include all Muslims: they are all subject to the law of jihad.

"The unfaithful" and "the ungrateful" refer to the polytheists, because they were characterized by extreme disloyalty and ingratitude. God entrusted them the true religion by leaving it within their innate nature (*fiṭrah*) as a trust, so that they may achieve felicity in both worlds by observing and maintaining this trust. He further informed them of it through His messenger. Yet, they betrayed Him through denial and disbelief. He immersed them in His apparent and hidden bounties, but they were ungrateful and did not give thanks to Him through worship.

The verse also sets the scene for the next verse which grants the permission to fight. As a preliminary, it says that surely God will defend the believers against the polytheists, because He does not like the latter due to their unfaithfulness and ungratefulness. This implies that He likes the former due to their faithfulness and gratefulness. Thus, by defending the believers He is effectively defending His religion which is held by the believers. God is the Guardian and Protector of the believers; He protects them against His enemies, as He says: *That is because Allah is the Protector of those who believe, and because the unbelievers shall have no protector for them* (47:11).

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظُلِمُوا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(22:39) ***Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they*** **(bi-annahum)** ***are oppressed, and most surely Allah is able to assist them.***

Based on the apparent context of the verse, saying *permission is given* marks a *new* injunction, as opposed to stating or referring to a *previous* permission. It is about the permission to fight and wage war, as inferred from *those upon whom war is made.* These are the same as *those who believe* in the previous verse (22:38), but described differently in order to convey what they are permitted to do.

The common recitation is *yuqātalūna* in the passive voice (*those upon*

whom war is made), meaning "those whom the polytheists have fought against." This shows that the polytheists were the first ones to wage war against the believers. The letter *bāʾ* in *bi-annahum* is for causality or justification (*sababiyyah*). It means: "They are given permission to fight *because* they are oppressed." This oppression is then interpreted in the next verse: *Those who have been expelled from their homes without just cause…* (22:40).

The verse does not explicitly identify the Subject Who is giving permission. This [vagueness] conveys exaltation and magnification [of the Subject]. A similar sense of exaltation and magnification can is found at the end of the verse: *and most surely Allah is able to assist them*. It only speaks about God's *ability and possibility* to assist them, but it does not affirm whether He will *actually* assist them or not. This shows that aiding them is nothing significant or burdensome for God, because He has power over all things.

The meaning is: "Permission is given by God to those whom the polytheists have fought"—that is, the believers—"because they have been oppressed by the polytheists. God is most surely able to assist them"—which is an indirect way of saying that He will help and assist them.

الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ۗ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَهُدِّمَتْ صَوَامِعُ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدُ يُذْكَرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ۗ وَلَيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(22:40) ***Those who have been expelled from their homes without just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And had Allah not repelled some people by others, certainly, many cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is often remembered would have been demolished; and surely Allah will help the one who helps His cause; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.***

This verse explains how the believers were oppressed: by being expelled from their homes. The polytheists expelled them from their homes in Mecca without just cause.

The polytheists did not physically transport the Muslims out of the city, but they began causing trouble for them, torturing them, and harassing them, until they had no alternative but to leave Mecca. Thus they were forced to leave their city and abandon their homes and belongings. Some migrated to Ethiopia, and others migrated to Medina after the Prophet's

migration. Therefore, saying that "the polytheists *expelled* the believers" means that the polytheists left them no other choice but to leave.

… except that they say: Our Lord is Allah: This is an unconnected exception (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*).[1] They were expelled only because they said, *Our Lord is Allah.* This expression indicates the misunderstanding and poor judgment of the polytheists. They had deviated so far from the truth that they considered themselves justified in expelling people from their houses because they believed that *Our Lord is Allah,* which is rather the truth.

Some exegetes have said that this phrase is a connected exception (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*), which takes an exception to "just cause" (*ḥaqq*). The meaning would be: "They were expelled from their homes without any truth, except the only truth which was their statement: *Our Lord is Allah*." The reader would certainly agree that this does not comply with what is meant here. The verse intends to say that they were expelled from their homes *without any justification*, not that they were expelled because of *only this* word of truth as opposed to other truths.

Those who have been expelled from their homes are only a subset of believers: Muhājirīn (Meccan Immigrants). This is an example of referring to a whole by mentioning only some of its members—on the account of their unity and agreement. Indeed, the believers are brethren and form a united front against their opponents. There are countless cases in the Qurʾan where a nation is described by the qualities of some of its members.

… And had Allah not repelled some people by others, certainly many cloisters* (ṣawāmiʿ) *and churches* (biyaʿ) *and synagogues* (ṣalawāt) *and mosques* (masājid) *in which Allah's name is often remembered would have been demolished: *Ṣawāmiʿ* is the plural of *ṣawmaʿah*, meaning "a building with a pointed roof." These buildings were built in mountains and deserts, and were inhabited by ascetics and hermits who used to seclude themselves to worship God. *Biyaʿ* is the plural of *bīʿah*, meaning

1 An "unconnected exception" (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*) means that what is excepted is not a member of the original group, as opposed to an ordinary exception, called "connected exception" (*istithnāʾ muttaṣil*). Declaring that "*Our Lord is Allah*" is clearly no "*just cause*" for being "*expelled from their homes*." That is why this phrase is an unconnected exception, which means that it is a new independent statement with a complete meaning by itself. (Trans.)

"Jewish temples" and "Christian churches." *Ṣalawāt* is the plural of *ṣalāh*, meaning "the Jewish place of prayer." It is an example of calling a place by the name of its function. The same is seen in this verse: *do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated…nor when you are under an obligation to perform a bath—unless (you are) traversing a way* (4:43), where "prayer" means "mosque" [for the latter rule].

It has also been said that *ṣalawāt* is the Arabic form of *ṣalūthā*, which is Hebrew for "place of prayer." *Masājid* is the plural of *masjid*, which is the Muslim place of worship.

This verse justifies the legislation of jihad and battle. It says that fighting is prescribed as a means of protecting religious societies against the enemies of religion who seek to extinguish God's light [of guidance and revelation]. Had it not been for jihad, God's signs and places of devotion would be demolished, and religious rituals and acts of worship would be abolished.

God's repulsion of some people by others is not limited to war. It also includes when people fend off each other in order to preserve their life and well-being according to their human nature and instinct. Human beings have an innate tendency and an established custom among themselves which ultimately comes from God. He has equipped them—as He has equipped other beings—with the required means and faculties to defend themselves. In case of human beings, God has further equipped them with a mental power that guides them to take up instruments to defend themselves, to maintain anything that contributes to their well-being, and to acquire what they need in order to flourish.

Fending off others by fighting is the last means that is sought for protection: it is only used when other means fail. One resorts to battle as an example of "the last remedy is cauterization" (*ākhir al-dawāʾ al-kayy*). It involves eliminating one thing to preserve another. Enduring hardship in order to obtain comfort is a prevalent custom within human societies, and even among other beings that have some sense of personality and independence.

This verse implies that fighting is one branch of this common natural custom. It is when people defend some aspect of their life by repelling others. This verse attributes this repulsion to God in the sense that He repels some people by others in order to preserve His religion.

It is evident that without such repulsion, religion would be entirely uprooted, and no sign of it would remain. Instead of talking about the

destruction of "religion," the verse talks about the destruction of "houses of worship"because these buildings are the signs and symbols that guide people to religion, remind them of it, and maintain its mental image in their minds.

… and surely Allah will help the one who helps His cause; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty: This is an emphasized vow that God will help one who helps Him through jihad in order to protect His religion. Indeed God fulfilled His promise and helped the Muslims in their wars and battles. He assisted them against their enemies as long as the Muslims assisted Him, and thus elevated His name.

The meaning is: I swear that God will surely help one who helps Him by protecting His religion. Surely He is a Strong God that no one can weaken or hinder from anything that He wants. He is a Mighty and Unconquerable God, Whose breadth of might cannot be encroached upon by anyone, and Whose sovereignty and dominion cannot be matched by anyone.

It is deduced from this verse that defense laws also existed in the previous religions in one way or another, although their details are not specified.

الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤١﴾

(22:41) ***Those who, should We establish them in the land, will keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and enjoin good and forbid evil; and Allah's is the end of affairs.***

This is another description of the believers that were mentioned at the beginning of these verses [22:38]. It describes the entire community as a whole, and does not concern specific individuals. "Establishing them in the land" means giving them the ability to choose the kind of life that they want, without being blocked by any impediment or rival.

God is saying that these are people who, if they are established in the land and given the freedom to choose the kind of life that they like, will found a righteous society in which prayer is established, alms are given, good is enjoined and evil is forbidden. The verse specifically mentions prayer out of all acts of worship, and the poor-rate (*zakāh*) out of

all financial offerings because of the significance of each in its category.[1]

This verse is a general description of those who establish a righteous society, and it refers to *those who believe* which were mentioned at the beginning of this set of verses [in 22:38]. Moreover, since the law of jihad is not limited to any particular group of Muslims, it follows that the verse includes *all* believers at the time of revelation, or rather *all* Muslims until the Day of Resurrection. The qualities mentioned here are a part of their nature: the Muslim nature in and of itself is characterized by righteousness, even though at times it might be covered by some veils.

Even though these verses talk about *those who have been expelled from their homes without just cause* (22:40), the verses are not just about the Muhājirīn (Meccan Immigrants). This is because the title *those who believe* at the beginning of these verses (22:38) is a more universal description, and the law of jihad surely applies to both the Muhājirīn and others. Therefore, these verses include all believers, regardless of whether these verses were revealed in Mecca or Medina.

Besides, the Anṣār (Medinite Supporters) and not the Muhājirīn were the first ones to initiate and then support the righteous society at the time of the Prophet that was first founded in Medina and later spread out to the entire Arabian Peninsula. That society is certainly an example of this verse, for it has been the best society in the history of Islam, where prayer was established, the poor-rate was paid, good was enjoined and evil was forbidden.

Historically speaking, the Muhājirīn never founded a society where they established the truth and abolished falsehood on their own and without the contribution of the Anṣār. The only way to say that the verse pertains only to the Muhājirīn is to say that it specifically refers to either (1) the four Rightly Guided Caliphs, according to the Sunnis; or (2) Imamᶜ Alī, according to the Shias. However, such interpretation would ruin the entire meaning of these verses.

Furthermore, historical records bear witness to certain acts by the first generation of Muslims, especially the Muhājirīn, that cannot by any means be classified as reviving the truth or eliminating falsehood—even if we excuse these individuals on the account of acting according to their

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1 It could also be that since these verses were revealed early on in Medina, many other devotional and financial practices were not prescribed yet. (Trans.)

individual reasoning (*ijtihād*).[1] Therefore, these verses do not concern *individuals*, but rather the *community* as a whole.

… and Allah's is the end of affairs: This emphasizes God's previous promise to support the believers to defeat the enemies of religion who have oppressed them.

وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ وَعَادٌ وَثَمُودُ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَقَوْمُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَقَوْمُ لُوطٍ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَأَصْحَابُ مَدْيَنَ ۖ وَكُذِّبَ مُوسَىٰ فَأَمْلَيْتُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُهُمْ ۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٤﴾

(22:42-44) ***And if they reject you, then already before you did the people of Noah and ᶜĀd and Thamūd reject (prophets). And the people of Abraham and the people of Lot, As well as those of Madyan, and Moses (too) was rejected, but I gave respite to the unbelievers, then did I overtake them, so how (severe) was My disapproval.***

These verses comfort the Prophet by saying that the denial of his people is not a new thing, for indeed the previous nations also rejected their prophets. The verses also warn and threaten the deniers by hinting at what the denial of the previous nations brought about for them: extermination through divine punishment.

The verses name the following nations:

Noah's tribe;

The tribe of ᶜĀd, who were the people of Prophet Hūd;

The tribe of Thamūd, who were the people of Prophet Ṣāliḥ;

Abraham's tribe;

Lot's tribe;

The people of Madyan (Midian), who were the people of Prophet Shuᶜayb (Jethro, Reuel).

Then, concerning those who rejected Moses it does not say "the people

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1 In jurisprudence, *ijtihād* means making the utmost effort (based on the available resources) to extract and infer Islamic laws (the shariah). It is also defined as the competence and ability to extract and infer the law of the shariah in any situation, including new ones. The Sunnis explain and justify the apparent errors, conflicts and contradictions among the Prophet's Companions as a result of their differences in extracting these rules and discerning their responsibility. This is sometimes referred to as *tanzīh al-ṣaḥābah* (exonerating the Companions). (Trans.)

of Moses," because his people were the Israelites, and they believed in him. Instead, he was denied by Pharaoh and his tribe. That is why the verse says: *and Moses (too) was rejected* (22:44).

… but I gave respite **(amlaytu, from imlāʾ)** ***to the unbelievers, then did I overtake them, so how (severe) was My disapproval*** **(nakīr):** *Imlāʾ* means "to postpone, to give time." *Nakīr* means *inkār* (disapproval, denial). The meaning is: "I gave time to the disbelievers"—referring to the above mentioned nations who rejected their prophets—"then I overtook them"—which is a way of talking about His punishment.

… so how (severe) was My disapproval: That is, how was My repudiation of their disbelief? This is a way of indicating the intensity of God's disapproval and the severity of His punishment.

فَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ فَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا وَبِئْرٍ مُعَطَّلَةٍ وَقَصْرٍ مَشِيدٍ ﴿٤٥﴾

(22:45) ***So how many a town did We destroy while it was unjust, so it fell down upon its roofs, and (how many a) deserted well and palace raised high*** **(mashīd from shāda and shīd).**

It fell down upon its roofs means that it was ruined by the roofs of the buildings collapsing first, and then the walls falling on them. A "deserted well" is a well that no one visits to draw water from. *Shāda* means "to plaster a building." *Shīd* means "plaster."[1]

Given the apparent context of these verses, this verse is an elaboration of: *so how (severe) was My disapproval* (22:44). The conjunction "and" in "*and a deserted well and palace raised high*" add these two items to "town" at the beginning of the verse.

The meaning is: There are so many towns that We destroyed their inhabitants while they were unjust, such that the walls of those towns fell on the roofs. And there are many wells that were deserted as their users vanished, such that no one goes to them to draw water any more. And

1 Therefore, *qaṣrin mashīd* means "a plastered palace," indicating luxury and elegance. Another lexical meaning for *mashīd* is "strong and/or high." The common point is that plaster was a means of making buildings strong. Since the verse is about God's power and the destruction of buildings, the primary meaning of *mashīd* here is "strong," although "plastered" is also appropriate in the sense that it serves the same meaning. (Trans.)

there are many plastered palaces whose residents have perished, such that there remains no sign of them to be seen and no sound of them to be heard.

In this verse, saying "wells" and "palaces" is a way of talking about "nomads" and "city-dwellers," respectively.

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا ۖ فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَٰكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(22:46) ***Have they not travelled in the land so that they would have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.***

This verse urges and encourages the audience to travel in order to learn from what was mentioned in the previous verse: towns that have been destroyed, wells that have been deserted, and plastered palaces that remain from the past generations that were exterminated. As one travels on land he has the opportunity to reflect on where these nations went wrong and what caused their destruction. Then one will realize that this happened to them because they associated partners with God, turned away from His signs, and acted arrogantly against the truth by rejecting God's messengers. As a result, those who have a capacity for independent thinking and contemplation will develop understanding hearts that will dissuade them from polytheism and disbelief. As for those who are not at that caliber, the lesson and warning that they draw from this journey will make them listen to the speech of a compassionate advisor who only wishes them well. Then they will listen to the admonition of a preacher who can distinguish between what benefits them from what harms them. Meanwhile, there is no admonition like God's Book, and there is no advisor like His Messenger. Hence, they will have ears by which they learn about their path to salvation.

This clarifies the dichotomy between "heart" and "ear" in this verse, without reference to the eye. The verse is about understanding the truth,distinguishing good from evil, and discerning what is beneficial from what is harmful. It presents two ways to achieve this:(1)independent intellection; and (2) following one that is permissible to be followed. These two are the functions of the heart and the ear, respectively.

Meanwhile, both of these tasks—that is, intellection and hearing—are functions of the heart in reality, where the heart means the rational soul which bears our cognitive faculties. It is this soul that makes the person follow what he understands himself or what hears from a compassionate advisor. The verse refers to this understanding and comprehension of the heart as the heart's "vision." Likewise, it refers to one who neither contemplates nor listens as "blind-hearted." The verse emphasizes this idea by saying that *real blindness* is that of the heart, not that of the eyes. After all, if one's *eye* loses its sight, he can recover some of his loss by using a cane or a guide who takes his hand. However, if one's *heart* loses its sight, then there is no substitute to make up for its loss. This is why the verse says: *for surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.*

The verse refers to the "breast" (*ṣadr*) as the container of the heart, which is an allegory similar to the other allegories in the verse: it talks about the understanding of the "heart" (*qalb*), while understanding is a function of the soul (*nafs*), as we discussed above.

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَلَنْ يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(22:47) ***And they ask you to hasten on the punishment, and Allah will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of your measurement.***

The people used to reject the Prophet when he warned them that God will punish them if they do not believe in Him. They used to challenge God's power, demand that His punishment should come immediately, and ask mockingly, "When will this promise be fulfilled?" God answers them here by saying: *Allah will by no means fail in His promise*. One possibility is that this relates to the polytheists of Mecca. Then their promised punishment would be the great loss that they suffered in the Battle of Badr. Another possibility is that it pertains to a promised punishment that will settle the dispute between the Prophet and his people. That final judgment has not occurred yet. God has discussed the latter in verse 10:47 and what follows after: *And every nation had a messenger; so when their messenger came, the matter was decided between them with justice* (10:47).

… and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of your

measurement: What is meant here is that a single day and a thousand years are equal to God. He does not belittle the former, and is not overwhelmed by the latter. This declines the people's push for the hastening of punishment by saying that short and long durations of time are equal to God. He is not affected by the shortness of one day or the length of a thousand years. That is why He does not hasten to punish them, for He is not afraid of losing the opportunity. Rather, He is a forbearing God. He gives them time and respite until they complete their degrees of wretchedness; then He will overtake them when their appointed time is up. That is a time that will neither be delayed nor advanced. This is why the verse says: *and how many a town did I give respite to while it was unjust; then I overtook it; and to Me is the return* (22:48)

… Allah will by no means fail in His promise: This sentence serves two purposes: (1) It assures and strengthens the Prophet. (2) It rejects the mocking, challenge and denial of the people against the Prophet's warnings about God's threats.

Some exegetes have said that "a day" in this verse refers to a day in the Hereafter when they will be punished. Each of those days is equivalent to a thousand worldly years,as measured by the people in this world. Others have said that due to the severity of punishment, one day of being punished by God will seem to them like a thousand years of punishment in this world. However, neither of these two interpretations complies with the first part of the verse or the next verse.

وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَمْلَيْتُ لَهَا وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُهَا وَإِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤٨﴾

(22:48) ***And how many a town did I give respite to while it was unjust; then I overtook it; and to Me is the return.***

As just mentioned above, this verse complements the last part of the previous: *surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of your measurement* (22:47). It serves as evidence for the claim made there. The meaning is: Short and long periods of time are the same to your Lord. Indeed He gave time and respite to many unjust towns, but then overtook them.

… and to Me is the return: This explains why God does not hasten to punish them. Since the end and return of everything is to God, there is no need for Him to hasten to their punishment, for He is not alarmed by losing the opportunity.

The above points show that this verse is not merely a repetition of

verse 45 above (*So how many a town did We destroy while it was unjust…*) because each of these verses has its own message.

The last verse mentioned God in the third person, this verse switches to the first person. This is according to God's position in the two verses: the previous verse was a description of an *attribute* of God, namely forbearance (*ḥilm*). This verse, on the other hand, is saying that God *Himself* is the opponent of those who oppose His Prophet.[1]

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا أَنَا لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٤٩﴾ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٥٠﴾ وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٥١﴾

(22:49-51) ***Say: O people! I am only a plain warner to you. Then (as for) those who believe and do good, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable sustenance. And (as for) those who strive to oppose Our signs, they shall be the inmates of the flaming fire.***

These verses order the Prophet to proclaim and introduce his message as one of warning, and to describe the magnificent rewards that await those who believe in this message and do good, as well as the evil consequences of denial and disbelief. God's "forgiveness" is the reward of faith, while "honorable sustenance"—which refers to Paradise and all of its bounties and pleasures—is the reward of good deeds. The evil reward of the disbelievers is to become perpetual inmates of the flaming fire.

… And (as for) those who strive **(saʿaw, from saʿy)** ***to oppose Our signs:*** *Saʿy* means "to walk very fast." Here it is a way of talking about expending one's maximum effort against God's signs and communications, where one does his best to render them void, and to extinguish their light by outstripping God. These verses are in the first person plural, in compliance with the previous verses,[2] with the exception of the last verse where a transition was made to the first person singular: *I gave respite…* (22:48).

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّىٰ أَلْقَى الشَّيْطَانُ فِي أُمْنِيَّتِهِ

1 It is as if God is saying: "now this is personal!" (Trans.)

2 To be more precise, only verses 41 and 45 above are explicitly in the first person plural. The rest of the verses seem to be in the third person. (Trans.)

فَيَنْسَخُ اللَّهُ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ ثُمَّ يُحْكِمُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٥٢﴾

(22:52) ***And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he envisioned*** **(tamannā)*****, Satan made an interjection*** **(alqā, from ilqāʾ)** ***with regard to his vision*** **(umniyyatihi)*****; but Allah annuls that which Satan casts; then does Allah establish His signs, and Allah is Knowing, Wise.***

Tamannī means "to assumes and supposes something that one likes, whether that is possible or impossible." Some examples are: a poor person's desire to be rich; a childless person's desire to have a child; and a person's wish to be immortal or be able to fly. *Umniyyah* means the imagined form of such desire which is a source of pleasure for the person. The root of this term is *mīm-nūn-yāʾ* [pronounced *many*, with the last two letters being consonants], which means "to suppose, to assume."

It has also been said that sometimes *tamannī* means *qirāʾah* or *tilāwah* (to read, to recite). *Tamannaytu al-kitāb* means "I read the book." Then, *ilqāʾ* in one's *tamannī* means interfering in one's recitation to distort it and pervert its meaning.

If *tamannī* means "what one desires and envisions in his heart," then the meaning of the verse would be: We did not send any messenger or prophet before you except that when he planned how to help his religion progress and convince the people to accept him, Satan interfered and meddled in his plans by tempting the people, enticing the wrongdoers and arousing the corrupt against him. Thus, Satan would ruin the plan of that messenger or prophet, and would render his efforts void. However, God would always annul and remove what Satan throws in. Then He would affirm His signs and communications by making the efforts of His messenger or prophet to succeed, and by manifesting the truth. God is Knowing and Wise.

If *tamannī* means "reading" or "recitation," then the meaning of the verse would be: We did not send any messenger or prophet before you except that when he read and recited God's verses, Satan cast misleading doubts and questions into them by tempting the people to dispute with him concerning those verses. Satan would do so in order to corrupt the belief of the believers. However, God would always annul the doubts that Satan throws in by making his prophets succeed in rejecting them, or by revealing something that would refute them.

This verse involves a clear distinction between the meanings of *nubuwwah* (prophethood) and *risālah* (messengership). Unlike what most exegetes have said, the relationship between the two cannot be that of absolute generality and particularity, where the former includes all instances of the latter, but not vice versa. Exegetes have commonly said that a messenger (*rasūl*) is one who has been given a message [through revelation] and commanded to propagate it, but a prophet (*nabī*) is anyone who has been given a message [through revelation] irrespective of the duty to propagate it. However, this interpretation of *rasūl* and *nabī* contradicts the verse. Since the verse has used the two terms in contradistinction, it implies that *nabī* here is not *rasūl*. Based on their suggested interpretation, this means that a *nabī* (prophet) is one who does not have the duty of propagation (*tablīgh*).However, this idea contravenes the phrase *We did not send* at the beginning of the verse, because "sending" means being charged with a message to propagate. As we discussed under verse 2:213,[1] the traditions from Ahl al-Bayt suggest that a messenger (*rasūl*) is one who receives revelation through an angel that he sees and speaks to, but a prophet (*nabī*) is one who receives revelation in a dream. We deduced the same meaning from the verse: *Say: Had there been on the earth angels walking about as settlers, We would certainly have sent down to them from the heaven an angel as a messenger* (17:95).[2]

Another suggested difference between messengership and prophethood is that messengers are those who are sent with a new shariah (religious code of law), while prophets also include those who confirm and follow a previous shariah. However, this distinction is also problematic, as we stated in our discussions on prophethood [under verse 2:213]. The problem is that there have been no more than five divinely prescribed codes of law, namely those of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. This is while the Qur'an has explicitly used the title "messenger" for many others. Not to mention that there is no proof or evidence for this suggested difference.

Two other suggestions are: (1) Messengers had official scriptures, but prophets did not. (2) Messengers had *some form of* scripture or writing, but prophets did not. Both of these views suffer from the same problems as the last one.

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1 See volume 3, pp. 187ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

2 See volume 25, p. 283 of the English translation. (Trans.)

… but Allah annuls that which Satan casts; then does Allah establish His signs: Here the verse changes from the first person to the third person. The reason for this transition is to explicitly name *Allah* as the One Who annuls and establishes, for He is the One Whom no one can resist. It is for the same reason that the name *Allah* has been repeated even though naturally a pronoun should have been used. Similarly, Satan's name has been repeated in order to stress that the one who casts is the Devil, who is of no significance before God. The plots and schemes of Satan are void with regard to Him.[1] Otherwise, if it were not to emphasize these points, the verse would have simply used pronouns: "He annuls what he casts, and then He establishes His signs."

لِيَجْعَلَ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾

(22:53) ***So that He may make what Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard*** **(al-qāsiyah, from qasāwah)*****; and most surely the unjust are in a great opposition.***

The "disease of the heart" is its inconsistency in intellection and understanding, meaning its failure to admit a truth that must be admitted. It is equivalent to being doubtful and suspicious about the truth. *Qasāwah* of the heart means "hard-heartedness, cold-heartedness." It is taken from *al-ḥajar al-qāsī*, meaning "hard rock." "Hardness of the heart" means its loss of gentle emotions—such as humility, compassion, modesty and love—that help a person comprehend true statements. A diseased heart is quick to apprehend the truth but slow to accept it. A hardened heart, however, is slow in both. Both of these hearts, on the other hand, are quick to accept Satanic whispers and temptations.

Satan's interjections ruin the circumstances against the truth and its people, and prevent the efforts of the messengers and prophets from being effective and bearing fruit. Even though this interference is attributed to Satan, it is also attributed to God inasmuch as His permission is required for the effectiveness of any phenomenon or action that takes place in His kingdom. Of course, what is attributed to God is only that in which there is some good, benefit and objective.

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1 See verse 4:76. (Trans.)

That is why God says here that there is some wisdom in these Satanic interjections: they are trials to test all people. Trial is one of God's universal customs that embraces the human world. It is through trial that the salvation of the felicitous and the damnation of the wretched are realized. But the trial of *"those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard"* is a specific trial that makes the wretched perfect their wretchedness. This is per God's universal rule of assisting and fostering everyone in the world, as He says: *All do We aid—these as well as those—out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined* (17:20).

So that He may make **(li-yajʿala)** ***what Satan casts a trial*** **(fitnah)** ***for those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard:*** The letter *lām* in *li-yajʿala* indicates explanation and justification (*taʿlīl*). It explains why Satan interjects in the desires and visions of the messengers and prophets: Satan does this *so that* God may do that. This means that Satan is under the command and authority of God—so that God's servants may be tested, and the people of doubt and denial may be tempted and deceived.

The following points should be clear by now: (1) *Fitnah* means a test or trial that results in deception and error. (2) *"Those in whose hearts is disease"* are the disbelievers who are doubtful [about the truth]. (3) "*those whose hearts are hard*" are the people of denial and defiance among the doubtful.

… and most surely the unjust are in a great opposition **(shiqāq baʿīd)*:*** *Shiqāq and mushāqqah* mean "disagreement, opposition." It is described as "far" (*baʿīd*), where "far" is really the attribute of *the person* who is characterized by opposition. The implied meaning is: And most surely the unjust are in such an opposition that makes them far from the truth and its people. Given the context of the verse, "the unjust" are the same as the deniers. It could also be that they are both the deniers and the doubters.

وَلِيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَيُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ فَتُخْبِتَ لَهُ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهَادِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(22:54) ***And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is*** **(annahū)** ***the truth from your Lord, so they may believe in it and their hearts may be lowly*** **(fa-tukhbita, from ikhbāt)** ***before it; and most surely Allah is the Guide of those who believe onto a right path.***

Based on the context, this verse adds to "*so that He may make*" in the

previous verse (where the addition is indicated by the conjunction "and" at the beginning of the verse). The word "that" at the beginning of the verse (the letter *lām* in *li-yaʿlama*) shows that this verse explains and justifies what was mentioned in the last verse: *but Allah annuls that which Satan casts; then does Allah establish His signs* (22:52). Based on this, the pronoun "it" in "it is (*annahū*)" refers to what the messenger or prophet envisions and desires, which is understood from *when he envisioned* (22:52). There is no reason for assuming that this pronoun refers to the Qur'an. *Ikhbāt* of the heart is when the heart becomes soft and humble.

The meaning is: God annuls that which Satan casts. Then God establishes His signs so that—by the means of this annulment and establishment—those who have been given knowledge may know that what the messenger or the prophet had planned and desired is the truth from your Lord. This in turn is meant to invalidate what Satan casts. Thus, they [those who have been given knowledge] would believe in it [that is, in the truth from your Lord] and their hearts may become soft and humble before it.

Another possibility is that the conjunction "and" joins this verse to an omitted [implied]statement, where both statements together justify what was mentioned in the last verse: *So that He may make what Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard…* (22:53).

The meaning in this case would be: "We talked about this fact for such-and-such a reason [which is omitted], and also so that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord." Adding a statement to an omitted statement is rather a common usage in the Qur'an. Another similar example is the use of "and" in the following verse: *We bring these days to people in turns, and that Allah may know those who believe* (3:140).[1]

… and most surely Allah is the Guide of those who believe onto a right path: This statement explains and justifies *why* God has the above mentioned purpose in His actions. The first part of the verse implied that God's purpose in annulling what Satan casts and establishing His signs is *"that those who have been given knowledge may know"* that the plans and

1 In such cases, the conjunction "and" (*wāw*) may seem superfluous because there is nothing to connect to. However, it is a subtle hint at there being other considerations, wisdoms and secrets. In short, the conjunction "and" implies that "there is more to it than this." (Trans.)

desires of His messengers and prophets are the truth. Then this last part of the further adds that God has this purpose *because* He is their Guide. He wants to guide them to a right path by this teaching and instruction of His.

وَلَا يَزَالُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِنْهُ حَتَّىٰ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَغْتَةً أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابُ يَوْمٍ عَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٥﴾

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(22:55) ***And those who disbelieve shall not cease to be in doubt concerning it until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes upon them the chastisement of a barren day*** **(ʿaqīm).**

This verse, as one can see, states that the above mentioned disbelievers will remain deprived of faith until the end of their lives. Since some of the disbelievers at the time of revelation became believers later on, this verse cannot be about *all* disbelievers of the time. Therefore, it must be about the prominent figures and leaders of the Quraysh [tribe] who did not believe [in Islam] until they died. Thus, the subject here is the same as the subject in the verse: *Surely those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe* (2:6).

A day is *ʿaqīm* (barren, infertile) if it is not followed by another day. There are two possible meanings for it: (1) the Day of Resurrection [in the sense that it is eternal]; or (2) the a day of one's death or a community's destruction [in this world]. Given the next two verses, what is meant here is the Day of Resurrection.

The meaning is: those who disbelieve will continue to doubt the Qur'an until they are overtaken by the Day of Resurrection or by the chastisement of that day. That is a day that will come suddenly, without giving them a chance to make any preparations or plans for it. Nor does it leave any day after it so that they may make up for what they missed before.

The verse alternates between the Day of Resurrection and its chastisement [by using the term "or"] because either of them is sufficient in removing their doubt and suspicion, and making them to confess the truth. God says: *They shall say: O woe to us! Who has raised us up from our sleeping place? This is what the Beneficent Allah promised, and the messengers told the truth* (36:52). He also says: *And on the day when those who disbelieve shall be brought before the fire: Is it not true? They shall say: Aye! By our Lord!* (46:34).

It should thus be clear that the two descriptions of "that day" in this

verse—that is, being "sudden" and "barren"—serve two meanings: (1) it is a day which cannot be evaded by any plot or effort; and (2) it is a day beyond which there will be no chance to rectify the past.

الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٥٦﴾ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

(22:56-57) ***The kingdom on that day shall be Allah's; He will judge between them; so those who believe and do good will be in gardens of bliss. And (as for) those who disbelieve in and reject Our signs, these it is who shall have a disgraceful chastisement.***

As we have mentioned a few times, *the kingdom on that day shall be Allah's* means that God's possession of the kingdom will become *evident* and *manifest* on that day. Otherwise, the kingdom *always* belongs to Him. The same applies to the other qualities and descriptions of the Day of Resurrection in the Qur'an, such as the idea that "all affairs on that day will belong to God"[1] and the idea that "all power on that day will be God's."[2]

However, it should be clarified that this manifestation of God's kingdom is not meant in a metaphorical or figurative sense. There are two types of kingdom: (1) real authority that is based on existential ownership (called *mulk ḥaqīqī*); and (2)apparent, formal and notional authority that is based on social conventions (called *mulk majāzī* or *ṣūrī*). The authority that is found in anything other than God is an apparent, notional authority that God has given that being, while at the same time He possesses the real authority over that thing in the truest sense. What happens on the Day of Resurrection is that this cover of apparent authority will be lifted from all things. Hence, no authority will remain except real authority, which exclusively belongs to God [and has ever belonged to Him]. It is in this sense that the Day of Resurrection is specifically characterized by: *the kingdom on that day shall be Allah's*. The same logic applies to the other qualities of that day [such as God's exclusive possession of command and power].

*… **He will judge between them:*** There shall be no judge other than God, because judgment is a branch and division of kingdom. Since no one will have any share of kingdom and authority on that day, no one will

1 See verse 82:19. (Trans.)

2 See verse 2:165. (Trans.)

have any share of judgment either.

… so those who believe and do good will be in gardens of bliss. And (as for) those who disbelieve in and reject Our signs, these it is who shall have a disgraceful chastisement: These verses present God's judgment on that day. *Those who disbelieve in and reject Our signs* (22:57) are those who arrogantly oppose God's signs and revelation.

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Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said: The Messenger of God was not commanded or permitted to fight until Gabriel descended with the verse: *Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed* (22:39), and tied a sword around his neck.[1]

(2) The polytheists constantly used to bother the Muslims, who would then go to the Messenger of God and complain to him while they had been beaten and tortured. He used to tell them, "Be patient, because I have not been ordered to fight." This was the case until the Prophet migrated. It was there in Medina that God revealed to him this verse, which is the first verse that was revealed concerning battle.[2]

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Author's comment: This verse is also identified as the first verse that was revealed about battle by *al-Durr al-manthūr*, which narrates this from many collections of hadith, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās and others.

Some of these narrations say that the verse was revealed only about the Muhājirīn (Meccan Immigrants) among the Prophet's Companions. Assuming these accounts to be authentic, this should be viewed as the interpretation of the narrators. Otherwise,the verse is unconditional, as we discussed above. The law of jihad is a universal and comprehensive law, and thus it does not make sense to address it only to a specific group in the community. The same argument applies to verse 22:41 (*Those who, should We establish them in the land…*) and even to verse 22:40 (*Those who have been expelled from their homes without just cause…*), as we discussed above. The next five narrations [numbers 3 to 7] should also be viewed in the same light:

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(3) Concerning *Those who have been expelled from their homes* (22:40)

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Imam al-Bāqir said: This was revealed about the Muhājirīn, and it also applies to Muḥammad's Household, who have been frightened and driven out of their homes.[1]

(4) In another narration about this verse, Imam al-Bāqir said: That is us; it has been revealed about us.[2]

(5) Imam al-Bāqir also said: This applies to al-Ḥusayn.[3]

(6) Concerning *those who will enjoin good and forbid evil* (22:41) Imam al-Bāqir said: We are the ones.[4]

(7) Concerning the verse *a deserted well and a palace raised high* (22:45) Imams al-Ṣādiq and al-Kāẓim said: *A deserted well* is a silent Imam, and *a palace raised high* is a speaking Imam [that is, an Imam without and with sociopolitical authority, respectively].[5]

(8) The Messenger of God said: A blind person [in reality] is not one whose sight (*baṣar*) is blind, but a [truly] blind person is one whose insight (*baṣīrah*) is blind.[6]

(9) Imam al-Bāqir said: A prophet is one who does not see the angel [of revelation] when he is awake, but he sees it in a dream and hears its voice. A messenger, however, is one who sees the angel both in wakefulness and in dreams, and hears its voice.[7]

Author's comment: There are other narrations that confirm this. According to the narrations, "seeing the angel" refers to the angel coming down to the messenger,appearing to him, and conveying the revelation to him by speech. Some of these narrations were presented in our discussion on prophethood under verse 2:213.[8]

(10) Saʿīd b. Jubayr said: The Messenger of God recited Chapter 53

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Al-Manāqib*.

3 *Rawḍat al-kāfī*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

5 *Al-Kāfī,Maʿānī al-akhbār* and *Kamāl al-dīn*.

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Tirmidhī's *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, Abū Naṣr al-Sajzī's *al-Ibānah*, al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān* and al-Daylamī's *Musnad al-firdaws*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Jarād.

7 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah.

8 See volume 3, pp. 187ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

(al-Najm) in Mecca. When he reached verses 53:19-20 (*Have you then considered Lāt and Uzzā, and Manāt, the third, the last?*), Satan cast these words onto his tongue: "They are the exalted and splendid idols whose intercession is hoped for."

The polytheists said, "He had never expressed a positive view of our gods until this day." So he and they all prostrated.

Then Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, "Iterate what I revealed to you." The Prophet did so, and when he reached, "They are the exalted and splendid idols whose intercession is hoped for," Gabriel said, "I did not bring this to you. This is from Satan."

At that point God revealed: *And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet…* (22:52).[1]

Author's comment: This account is also narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās and a group of the Followers (Tābiʿīn), through several chains of transmission. Many scholars of hadith have authenticated it, including Ibn Ḥajar. However, the decisive proofs of the Prophet's infallibility refute the content of this account even if we assume its transmission to be authentic. It is incumbent to clear the Prophet's sacred position from such mistakes. Moreover, this account attributes the worst and most abhorrent form of ignorance to the Prophet, because he recited "They are the exalted and splendid idols whose intercession is hoped for" without realizing that these were not God's words that Gabriel had brought. He did not realize that this statement was explicit heresy and entailed apostasy (*irtidād*). He continued with this until he and they prostrated at the end of the chapter, without realizing his ignorance. Even when Gabriel descended to him and ordered him to iterate the chapter, he uttered these two sentences again, insisting on his ignorance, which caused Gabriel to deny him. Then a verse was revealed to him, affirming a similar abhorrent ignorance and patent mistake for *all* prophets and messengers by saying: *And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet, but when he spoke, Satan made an interjection with regard to his speech* (22:52).

A common excuse in defense of this story is that what the Prophet said was a slip of the tongue and an error that he did not realize, because Satan had taken over his tongue for the moment. However, this cannot be the case, as we just explained. It is not supported by the detailed content

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh, via an authentic chain of transmission.

of the account, nor do the proofs of the Prophet's infallibility allow for such mistake and error.

Moreover, if there is a possibility for Satan to have such control over the Prophet's tongue and cast a verse or two in the middle of the Noble Qur'an, then one cannot be sure of what is God's word and what is not. In other words, the other verses of the Qur'an could also involve Satan's interference and interjection. If that were a possibility, then this very verse—*And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet…* (22:52)—could also be something that Satan cast on the Prophet's tongue, which the Prophet took to be the word of God revealed by Gabriel, just like what happened in the story of "the exalted and splendid idols." That would mean that Satan threw in this verse (22:52) to disprove some of his interjections—that is, "the exalted and splendid idols"—in order to leave his other interjections unnoticed.

Furthermore, if Satan's interference in the Qur'an is a possibility, then one could equally say that perhaps what God really said was the statements about "the exalted and splendid idols," while all the other verses against idolatry and this very verse—*And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet…* (22:52)—are the words of Satan. In other words, Satan has used this verse (22:52) to refute the verses about "the exalted and splendid idols" [which were supposedly revealed by God] and to disguise his many other interjections in the Qur'an [as God's words]. Such a possibility would completely eradicate the credibility and reliability of the Qur'an. Then one cannot trust God's Book whatsoever. That would render the Prophet's mission totally vain and his claim of prophethood entirely void. The Holy Precinct of God is far exalted above that.

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Verses 58-66

وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ قُتِلُوا أَوْ مَاتُوا لَيَرْزُقَنَّهُمُ اللَّهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۚ وَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ لَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾ لَيُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ مُدْخَلًا يَرْضَوْنَهُ ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٩﴾
ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ عَاقَبَ بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبَ بِهِ ثُمَّ بُغِيَ عَلَيْهِ لَيَنْصُرَنَّهُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ
غَفُورٌ ﴿٦٠﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ
سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٦١﴾ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ
وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٦٢﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ
الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٦٣﴾ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ وَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦٤﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْفُلْكَ
تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَيُمْسِكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٦٥﴾ وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ
الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ ﴿٦٦﴾

(22:58) *And (as for) those who emigrated in Allah's way and are then slain or die, Allah will most certainly grant them a goodly sustenance, and most surely Allah is the best Giver of sustenance.*

(22:59) *He will certainly cause them to enter a place of entrance which they shall be well pleased with, and most surely Allah is Knowing, Forbearing.*

(22:60) *That (shall be so); and he who retaliates with the like of that with which he has been afflicted and has been oppressed, Allah will most certainly aid him; most surely, Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving.*

(22:61) *That is because Allah causes the night to enter into the day and causes the day to enter into the night, and because Allah is Hearing, Seeing.*

(22:62) *That is because Allah is the Truth, and that what they call upon besides Him—that is falsehood, and because Allah is the High, the Great.*

(22:63) *Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky so the earth becomes green? Surely Allah is Subtle, Aware.*

(22:64) *His is whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth; and most surely Allah is the Self-sufficient, the Praised.*

(22:65) *Do you not see that Allah has made subservient to you whatsoever is on the earth and the ships running in the sea by His command? And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to people.*

(22:66) *And He it is Who has brought you to life, then He will cause you to die, then bring you to life (again); most surely humanity is ungrateful.*

Introduction

These verses follow the message of the previous verses. They discuss the reward of those who migrated and then were either killed while fighting in God's way, or died. The verses encourage fighting and promise God's aid, as seen in the verse: *that (shall be so); and he who retaliates with the like of that with which he has been afflicted and has been oppressed, Allah will most certainly aid him…* (22:60).

There is something special with these verses that is not found anywhere else in the Noble Qur'an: there are eight consecutive verses here that all end with two of God's Beautiful Names after mentioning the Majestic Name of *Allah*. If we assume that the pronoun "He" (*Huwa*) is also one of God's Names, then these verses conclude with sixteen of God's Names:[1]

He (*Huwa*)
the best Giver of sustenance (*Khayr al-Rāziqīn*)
the Knowing (*al-ʿAlīm*)
the Forbearing (*al-Ḥalīm*)
the Pardoning (*al-ʿAfuww*)

1 Another possibility is that "He" (*huwa*) is only a pronoun here, as it has been repeated in verses 58, 62 and 64.

the Forgiving (*al-Ghafūr*)
the Hearing (*al-Samīʿ*)
the Seeing (*al-Baṣīr*)
the High (*al-ʿAliyy*)
the Great (*al-Kabīr*)
the Subtle (*al-Laṭīf*)
the Aware (*al-Khabīr*)
the Self-sufficient (*al-Ghaniyy*)
the Praised (*al-Ḥamīd*)
the Compassionate (*al-Raʾūf*)
the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*)

Then, the ninth verse says that God gives life and death (22:66). It is also stated in these verses that God is the Truth (22:62), and that everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him (22:64). These are effectively four further names:

the Reviver (*al-Muḥyī*)
the Giver of death (*al-Mumīt*)
the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*)
the Owner or King (*al-Mālik* or *al-Malik*)

Thus, these eight verses incorporate twenty of God's names in a most elegant and splendid way.

Commentary

وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ قُتِلُوا أَوْ مَاتُوا لَيَرْزُقَنَّهُمُ اللَّهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(22:58) ***And (as for) those who emigrated in Allah's way and are then slain or die, Allah will most certainly grant them a goodly sustenance, and most surely Allah is the best Giver of sustenance.***

This chapter previously talked about the expulsion of the Muhājirīn (Meccan Immigrants) from their homes by force and oppression [22:40]. This verse promises them a reward of a goodly sustenance for migrating and enduring afflictions in the way of God.

Migration alone is not sufficient to qualify for this reward; it must be migration *in Allah's way*. This is because God's reward is for righteous deeds, and what makes an act righteous is if it is done with a sincere intention for the sake of God, not for other goals such as wealth, power or other worldly objectives. For the same reason, the qualification "in God's way" also applies to: *are then slain or die*. That is, the verse describes those who leave their homes or are force to leave their homes *in Allah's way*, and are then slain or die *in Allah's way*.

… and most surely Allah is the best Giver of sustenance: This ending of the verse justifies the previous promise, that: *Allah will most certainly grant them a goodly sustenance*. "Goodly sustenance" refers to God's bounties in the Hereafter, because it refers to what one receives after he is killed or dies. Hence, this verse uses the word "sustenance" (*rizq*) for Paradise, just like in the verse: *they are alive (and) are provided sustenance* (yurzaqūna) *there with their Lord* (3:169).

لَيُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ مُدْخَلًا يَرْضَوْنَهُ ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

(22:59) ***He will certainly cause them to enter a place of entrance* (mudkhalan)** ***which they shall be well pleased with, and most surely Allah is Knowing, Forbearing.***

Mudkhal is a noun of place (*ism makān*) derived from *idkhāl*. It can also be a gerund (*maṣdar*), but this possibility is not likely here given the context of the verse.[1]

This place of entrance is described as one *which they shall be well pleased with.* Their pleasure is mentioned unconditionally, which indicates their utmost level of satisfaction according to whatever they desire, as the Qur'an says: *they shall have therein what they desire* (25:16).

He will certainly cause them to enter a place of entrance which they shall be well pleased with: This is an exposition of: *Allah will most certainly grant them a goodly sustenance* (22:58). He will cause them to enter an entrance with pleasure and satisfaction, despite their forced expulsion by the polytheists which was against their will and pleasure. That is why

1 *Idkhāl* means "to make one enter." Therefore, *mudkhal* would mean "the place where one is made to enter," or more simply, "the place of entrance." *Mudkhal* as a gerund would mean "entering"; that is, "the act of entering." The meaning would be: He will certainly cause them to go through such act of entering that they shall be well pleased with it. (Trans.)

the verse then justifies this reward by saying: *most surely Allah is Knowing, Forbearing*. He knows what is pleasing to them, so He will prepare it for them in advance. And if He does not hasten to punish their oppressive enemies, it is because He is Forbearing.

ذَٰلِكَ وَمَنْ عَاقَبَ بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبَ بِهِ ثُمَّ بُغِيَ عَلَيْهِ لَيَنْصُرَنَّهُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ غَفُورٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

(22:60) ***That (shall be so)*****(dhālika)*****; and he who retaliates*** **(ʿāqaba, from ʿiqāb)** ***with the like of that with which he has been afflicted and has been oppressed, Allah will most certainly aid him; most surely, Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving.***

Dhālika (lit. "that is") at the beginning of the verse is the predicate of an omitted subject. The implied meaning is: "The matter is that" or "the truth is that which We told you."[1] *ʿIqāb* (retaliation, retribution, punishment) is a pain that is inflicted upon a person for doing something painful to the one who is now retaliating. It is called *ʿiqāb* because it comes after (*ʿaqīb*) one's act.[2]

"Retaliating with a similar affliction" is a way of saying "equal retaliation and treatment." Such equal treatment is not good unless the first affliction was unjust. That is why the verse says, *and has been oppressed* in order to qualify the initial affliction.

… Allah will most certainly aid him; most surely: Since these verses are in the context of permission for jihad, the apparent meaning of "aid" here is assisting the oppressed in battle and giving them victory over their oppressors. Another possible meaning is that "aid" means the legislation of a law that gives the oppressed the right to retaliate for his unjust loss and damage. This is inferred from the verse: *and whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority, so let him not exceed the just limits in slaying; surely he is aided* (17:33). Giving legal authority and permission to an oppressed person to treat the unjust oppressor in a like manner is a way of giving him power over someone who previously had such power over him.

This should clarify the verse's justification at the end: *most surely Allah*

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1 More simply, *dhālika* here means "that is the case" or "thus shall it be." (Trans.)

2 Therefore, *ʿiqāb* literally means "aftermath, consequence." (Trans.)

is Pardoning, Forgiving. One of the results of God's attributes of pardon and forgiveness is to give permission in cases of necessity, damage and the like. We have discussed this a few times under verses like: *but whoever is compelled by hunger, not inclining willfully to sin, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (5:3). We also elaborated on it in our discussion on "Punishment and Forgiveness" at the end of Chapter 5.[1]

Given this second possibility, the meaning of the verse would be: God has aided one who has been treated unjustly and retaliates in like manner by giving him permission to do so and not stopping him from equal retaliation. This is because God is most surely Pardoning and Forgiving, since He will erase the evil results and consequences that necessarily follows such treatment and retaliation.

It is as if any unpleasant infliction upon the people is by nature undesirable in the universe, but God effaces this undesirability and covers its evil effect—as long as it is equal retaliation by one who has been oppressed against his oppressor. God gives this person permission to do so. Such retaliation is not a sin.

The above interpretation should clarify the relevance of mentioning God's forbearance at the end of the last verse: *And most surely Allah is Knowing, Forbearing* (22:59). It also shows that when the verse says, *and* (thumma) *he has been oppressed*, the word *thumma* (lit. "then"; translated as "and") does not indicate temporal order or delay, but it is only to add another point.

Some exegetes have suggested another meaning for the verse: If one retaliates against a criminal according to his crime, but the criminal then oppresses him again by further affliction, then God will most surely aid him against that oppressor. God surely pardons and forgives the victim for his first retaliation, because it would have been better and more commendable if he had patience and had forgiven the criminal, as God says: *It is nearer to righteousness that you should relinquish* (2:237); *But whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from Allah* (42:40); *And whoever is patient and forgiving, these most surely are actions due to courage* (42:43).

However, there are a few problems with this interpretation:

In this interpretation, the word *thumma* means "then," indicating

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1 See volume 12, pp. 191ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

temporal order and delay. This separates the initial retaliation (*ʿiqāb*) from the following oppression (*baghy*), making them two separate events. If so, then "retaliation" here should be interpreted in an unconditional sense, because it is no longer qualified by "oppression," and indeed not all retaliation is in response to oppression. This, however, is inconsistent with their proposed interpretation, because their interpretation assumes that the person is retaliating for an *oppressive and criminal* affliction. This additional qualification [of oppression and crime] cannot be inferred from the text of the verse.

This suggested meaning interprets God's aid as something existential that He creates in the universe (*takwīn*), as opposed to an injunction that He legislates (*tashrīʿ*). In other words, the meaning of this statement—*Allah will most certainly aid him*—is that God will avenge the wrongdoer for his initial crime and his subsequent oppression. However, in reality we see that this is not always the case.

Fighting in the way of God against the polytheists is certainly one of the instances and applications of this verse [given the context]. However, according to the suggested meaning, it is better to pardon and forgive, which is a clear contradiction.[1]

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1 To complement the author's discussion, the following points can be added: (1) The other Qur'anic usages of the verb *ʿāqaba* (retaliate) are in contexts of *unjust* affliction (16:126, 60:11). This is part of the Qur'anic sense and usage of the term, without needing any additional qualification. *ʿĀqaba* in the Qur'an can be interpreted as retaliation for an unjust affliction through battle. Contrarily, the word *baghy* does not always mean "oppression" and is not always negative (4:34, 7:33, 42:42), although it is in this verse. (2) The apparent meaning of "*Allah will most certainly aid him*" (22:60) is existential support by making one dominate his enemies. The author's second objection would equally apply to other verses that promise aid and support for the prophets and believers (4:141, 10:103, 14:47, 22:38, 30:47, 37:171-173, 40:51, 58:21). (3) Given the previous verse and the context of revelation, this verse may concern those who tried to retaliate *before* God's permission for jihad. This is another possibility in addition to the author's plausible interpretation of: *Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving* (22:60). (4) The current verse can be closely matched with verses 42:39-43, which can be viewed as an interpretation and elaboration of what is meant here. In short, another possible meaning for the verse is: If one tries to retaliate for an initial unjust affliction but is oppressively suppressed, then God will certainly aid him. (Trans.)

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٦١﴾

(22:61) ***That is because Allah causes the night to enter into the day and causes the day to enter into the night, and because Allah is Hearing, Seeing.***

The "entrance" of day and night into one another means the replacement of one by another. For example, the morning light is substituted for the darkness of the night like an object that enters another, followed by an expansion of the day such that it covers the space that was previously covered by the night. Likewise, the darkness of the night advances on the light of the day just as an object enters another, followed by the expansion and encompassment of the night.

Based on the meaning of "aid" discussed in the previous verse, this verse presents a metaphorical picture for how the oppressed will dominate the oppressor. That is, the above mentioned aid is according to God's custom of making one opposite overcome another, just as He causes the night to enter into the day, and causes the day to enter into the night. Indeed God hears what they say and sees what they do. He helps the oppressed because He sees his right being taken,and hears his complaint and supplication—which is expressed by his *lisān al-ḥāl* (inner tongue, language of condition, existential capacity).

There are some other suggested meanings for the verse that do not comply with the context. I decided it is better to ignore them.

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٦٢﴾

(22:62) ***That is because Allah is the Truth, and that what they call upon besides Him—that is falsehood, and because Allah is the High, the Great.***

Dhālika (lit. "that is") at the beginning of the verse refers to God's aid (*naṣr*, mentioned in verse 22:60). It could also refer to both His aid and the justification given for it (in verse 22:61).[1]

There are two possible meanings for the strict exclusion seen in: *Allah*

1 The two possible meanings would be: (1) God will aid the oppressed *because Allah is the Truth*… (2) God aids the oppressed and causes the day and night enter one another *because Allah is the Truth*… (Trans.)

is the Truth and *what they call upon besides Him—that is falsehood*.

(1) God is all and only true, without any mix of falsehood. But what they call upon besides Him, meaning the idols, are entirely and only false, without any shred of truth. Thus, He has unconditional authority in the creation of things, and can rule as He wills in or against their favor.

(2) God is the only being that is really true. Truth is exclusively to be found in Him; there is no other truth except by His grant and validation. And falsehood is exclusively found in what they call upon, meaning the idols, as well as anyone or anything that they rely on and resort to in their needs. There is no other truth because there is nothing else than God. Anything other than God is false because it has no truth in and of itself.

Either way, the implied meaning is: God has authority and influence in the external world of existence (*takwīn*) as well as the world of legislation (*tashrīʿ*) *because* He is *the* Truth, such that any other truth is established *only* by His will. On the contrary, anything other than God that the deviators and transgressors serve and rely on is vain and false, without the ability to do anything.

… and because Allah is the High, the Great: His highness is such that He dominates others but is not dominated by anyone. His greatness is such that nothing can abase and humiliation Him. These two qualities are branches and implications of His Truth, meaning that He is established without any abolition, and He exists without any termination.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٦٣﴾

(22:63) ***Do you not see that Allah sends down water from the sky so the earth becomes green? Surely Allah is Subtle, Aware.***

"Sky" here means "above." The two events mentioned here—the "descent of water from the sky" and the "greening of the earth"—are evidence for God's universal power that was stated above.

… Surely Allah is Subtle, Aware: This is an explanation and justification for the greening of earth through water that comes down from the sky. Overall, the verse's evidence and its subsequent justification sum up to the following meaning: Since God is surely Subtle and Aware, He sends down water which makes the earth green, and this bears witness to His all-encompassing power.

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦٤﴾

(22:64) ***His is whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth; and most surely Allah is the Self-sufficient, the Praised.***

This is apparently another complement for "*do you not see that…*" (22:63). Therefore, it would add to the justification in the previous verse. The meaning is: Surely God is Subtle, Aware (22:63), and He is the Owner of whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth. Thus He directs and manipulates His kingdom as He wills, according to His subtlety and awareness.

It may also be that this verse is independent of the previous verse [not an addition to it]. Then it would be a separate justification [again for verse 22:62].

… and most surely Allah is the Self-sufficient, the Praised: This shows that God has no need for any of His doings because He is absolutely Self-sufficient. At the same time, all of His acts are commendable, beautiful, and beneficial, and thus He is absolutely Praiseworthy. Therefore, the two names together imply that God does not do anything except that which is beneficial, yet these benefits do not accrue to Him, but to His creatures.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالْفُلْكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَيُمْسِكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٦٥﴾

(22:65) ***Do you not see that Allah has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the earth and the ships running in the sea by His command? And He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except with His permission; most surely Allah is Compassionate, Merciful to people.***

This is further evidence for God's universal power. Talking about the subservience of "what is on the earth" against the subservience of "the ships in the sea" implies that what is meant by "earth" here is land as opposed to water. Adding the subsequent part of the verse (*He withholds the heaven…*) to these points, the verse is saying overall that God has indeed made *everything* subservient to you: heaven, earth, land and water.

What is meant by "heaven" here is "above," including anything that is above us, such as meteors and thunderbolts. God prevents them from falling to the earth except when He permits it.

The verse ends with the two attributes of compassion and mercy, as a

complement to God's bounty and favor upon the people.

وَهُوَ الَّذِى أَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَكَفُورٌ ﴿٦٦﴾

(22:66) ***And He it is Who has brought you to life, then He will cause you to die, then bring you to life (again); most surely humanity is ungrateful.***

"*Brought you to life*" is in the past tense, indicating that it concerns our life in this world. "*Then bring you to life*" refers to our eternal life after the Resurrection, not our temporary life in the *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this world and the resurrection). This is based on the importance and priority of mentioning the Hereafter.

This process—of life, followed by death and then followed by life—is one of the greatest bounties of God, by which God has perfected His grace upon us. That is why the verse ends with: *most surely humanity is ungrateful*.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verses 22:58-59 (*And (as for) those who fly in Allah's way… most surely Allah is Knowing, Forbearing*), it has been narrated that some Muslims said [to the Prophet]: "O Messenger of God! Now we know the good reward that God shall give to those who have been slain [in His way, based on what you have told us]. But we are also fighting right next to you as they did. So what will be *our* share if we die while we are with you?" Thus these two verses were revealed [in response to their inquiry].[1]

(2) Concerning verse 22:60 (*he who retaliates with the like of that with which he has been afflicted…*) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* says: It has been narrated that this verse was revealed about some polytheists of Mecca who encountered a group of Muslims two nights before the end of Muḥarram [the first month of the Islamic lunar year]. They said among themselves, "Muḥammad's followers will not fight in this month," and thus they attacked them. The Muslims adjured them [by God] not to fight against them in a sacred month, but the polytheists declined their request. Then God caused the Muslims to defeat them.

Author's comment: *Al-Durr al-manthūr* also narrates this, on the

1 *Jawāmiᶜ al-jāmiᶜ*.

authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Muqātil.

However, this is clearly a weak narration, because the polytheists also used to refrain from fighting during the sacred months. This is further weakened by other narrations about the story of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Jaḥsh and his companions which was presented under verse 2:217 (*They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter…*).[1]

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1 See volume 3, pp. 245ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

Verses 67-78

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ ۖ فَلَا يُنَازِعُنَّكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۚ وَادْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۖ
إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٦٧﴾ وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ اللَّهُ
يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ
مَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ فِي كِتَابٍ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٧٠﴾ وَيَعْبُدُونَ
مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَمَا لَيْسَ لَهُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ
نَصِيرٍ ﴿٧١﴾ وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمُنْكَرَ ۖ
يَكَادُونَ يَسْطُونَ بِالَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا ۗ قُلْ أَفَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِشَرٍّ مِنْ ذَٰلِكُمُ ۗ
النَّارُ وَعَدَهَا اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٧٢﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ
فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوِ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ ۖ
وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ۚ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ ﴿٧٣﴾ مَا
قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٧٤﴾ اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٧٥﴾ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ
تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٧٦﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَافْعَلُوا
الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ۩ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ ۚ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا
جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ۚ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۚ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ
مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَٰذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ ۖ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَنِعْمَ
النَّصِيرُ ﴿٧٨﴾

(22:67) *To every nation We appointed an act of devotion which they observe, therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter and call to your Lord; most surely you are on a right way.*

(22:68) *And if they contend with you, say: Allah best knows what you do.*

(22:69) *Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection respecting that in which you differ.*

(22:70) *Do you not know that Allah knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely this is in a book; surely this is easy for Allah.*

(22:71) *And they serve besides Allah that for which He has not sent any authority, and that of which they have no knowledge; and for the unjust there shall be no helper.*

(22:72) *And when Our clear signs are recited to them you will find denial on the faces of those who disbelieve; they almost spring upon those who recite to them Our signs. Say: Shall I inform you of what is worse than this? The fire; Allah has promised it to those who disbelieve; and how evil the resort!*

(22:73) *O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the seeker and the sought.*

(22:74) *They have not estimated Allah with the estimation that i due to Him; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.*

(22:75) *Allah chooses messengers from among the angels and from among the people; surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing.*

(22:76) *He knows what is before them and what is behind them and to Allah are all affairs returned.*

(22:77) *O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord, and do good that you may succeed.*

(22:78) *And strive hard in (the way of) Allah, (such) a striving as is due to Him; He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; the faith of your father Abraham; He named you Muslims before and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people; therefore keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and hold fast by Allah; He is your Guardian; how excellent the*

Guardian and how excellent the Helper!

Introduction

These verses order the Prophet to propagate his message and discuss a few points about the truthfulness of this call and the falsehood of polytheism. They then charge the believers with a summary of religion, which consists of worshiping God and doing good. Finally, they finish by ordering the believers to fight in God's way as He deserves, and that marks the end of this chapter.

Commentary

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ ۖ فَلَا يُنَازِعُنَّكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۚ وَادْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۖ
إِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٦٧﴾

(22:67) ***To every nation We appointed an act of devotion* (mansakan)** ***which they observe* (nāsikūhu)*, therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter and call to your Lord; most surely you are on a straight guidance.***

Mansak here means *nusuk* (to worship). Some exegetes have interpreted it as a noun of place (*ism makān*) [meaning "place of worship"], but it is meant as a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) here because the verse refers to it as something that is performed and observed: *nāsikūhu* [from the same root, meaning "they perform that worship"].

"Every nation" means one nation after another throughout history, until the last nation [that is, Islam]. It does not refer to the different nations and races at the time of the Prophet—like the Arabs, the Persians and the Romans—because the Prophet's message was universal and his religion was for all nations at his time.

… therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter: This sentence forbids those who do not believe in the Prophet's call from disputing with him over the acts of worship that he brought. Now, forbidding someone who does not accept or acknowledge the authority of the commander is pointless. However, this prohibition is applicable to them even though they did not believe in the Prophet's message and had no regard for the commands and prohibitions that the Prophet brought. This is because the prohibition is based on a rational argument given at the beginning of

the verse; hence it is not pointless or ineffective.

Apparently this verse concerns the reaction of some non-Muslims (from the People of the Book or the polytheists) to certain Islamic rituals that had no precedent or equivalent in previous religions such as Judaism. They disputed with the Prophet concerning these rituals and said: "Where have these come from? Why was there nothing like them in the previous codes of law? If this were a prophetic legislation, then the followers of the previous prophets would recognize it."

The verse is saying that every nation had certain acts of devotion and worship that they observed. But these were not transmitted to the next nation because God would replace them with a set of rituals that was better and more suitable for the new nation due to their higher level of thought and their capacity for something more perfect and complete. Since the rituals of the previous nations were abrogated for the later nations, they should not dispute with the Prophet for bringing rituals that differ from those of the previous nations.

Saying that "they should not dispute with you" is equivalent to comforting the Prophet and telling him to remain in good spirit and not mind their criticism. Thus God continues by telling him: *and call to your Lord*. It is as if the Prophet was told: Relax! Care not for their disputes! Instead, busy yourself with what you have been ordered to do, which is to call to your Lord.

This command is then justified by saying: *most surely you are on a straight guidance*. "Straight" is an attribute of a *path*, but it is mentioned as an attribute of "guidance" metaphorically, in the sense that guidance *leads to* the right path.

وَإِنْ جَادَلُوكَ فَقُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(22:68) ***And if they contend with you, say: Allah best knows what you do.***

The last verse drew on the abrogation of laws to justify the difference between the rituals of the Prophet's religion and those of the previous religions. Given this context, "contention" here means dispute about this difference after its justification. The verse orders the Prophet to refer them to God's judgment, without reciprocating their disputes and engaging in debate with them.

Some exegetes have said that the clause, *if they contend with you*

includes *any* contention about religion. Others have said that it means contention about offering sacrifice. These interpretations, however, are not supported by the context of these verses.

… say: Allah best knows what you do: This prepares and sets the ground for referring them to God's judgment [in the next verse].

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اللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(22:69) ***Allah will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection respecting that in which you differ*** **(takhtalifūna, from ikhtilāf).**

That is: God best knows about your acts, and He will judge as One Who knows the fact of the matter. However, He will judge about your differences concerning the truth and your disagreements with its people only on the Day of Resurrection. *Ikhtilāf* and *takhāluf* are synonymous(meaning: to differ with one another), just like *istibāq* and *tasābuq* (meaning: to race with one another).

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ فِي كِتَابٍ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

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(22:70) ***Do you not know that Allah knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely this is in a book; surely this is easy for Allah.***

This verse proves and justifies God's knowledge about the actions of the people [stated in verse 22:68]. The implied argument is: (1) Anything that you do is a part of *what is in the heaven and the earth.* (2) God knows everything that *"is in the heaven and the earth."* (3) Therefore: *Allah best knows what you do* (22:68).

… Surely this is in a book: This emphasizes the first part of the verse. That is, what God knows is inscribed in a book, so it is not lost, God does not forget it, and He does not make mistakes.[1] Their actions are preserved as they are when He judges between them.

… surely this is easy for Allah: That is, inscribing what He knows in a preserved book is an easy task for God.

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وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزِّلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا وَمَا لَيْسَ لَهُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ نَصِيرٍ ﴿٧١﴾

1 See verse 20:52. (Trans.)

(22:71) ***And they serve besides Allah that for which*** **(bihi)** ***He has not sent any authority*** **(sulṭānan)**, ***and that of which they have no knowledge; and for the unjust there shall be no helper.***

The particle *bihi* here literally means "with" (*maʿa*). *Sulṭān* means "proof, argument." The meaning is: The polytheists have no evidence to justify their practice of associating partners with God and worshiping other gods because: (1) God has not sent any proof to approve their gods; and (2) they have no knowledge of their truth.

In addition to talking about an authority or proof sent by God, the verse also talks about the people's knowledge: *that for which He has not sent any authority, and that of which they have no knowledge*. This is because there are certain things that people know without any proof or argument, such as self-evident propositions.

Some exegetes have interpreted the "sending of authority" as transmitted arguments that one hears and adopts from another source, and "having knowledge" as rational and intellectual arguments. The meaning would be: "They worship besides God things that are not supported by any argument either from the religion or from the intellect." However, there is no evidence for this interpretation. Moreover, "sending authority" is something general: it includes both the sending of revelations upon a prophet and the sending of rational arguments upon hearts.

… and for the unjust there shall be no helper: This is a warning and threat to the polytheists. It says that they have no helper who can help them and keep them away from God's chastisement.

However, this sentence should be interpreted in line with the theme of the verse, which is the polytheists not having any proof or knowledge for their worship of idols. Therefore, "helper" (*naṣīr*) here means some proof or knowledge, because a proof assists one who employs it in his argument, and knowledge helps the knower. The verse's argument is that: (1) they are unjust; (2) *and for the unjust there shall be no helper* [where "helper" includes proof and knowledge]; (3) therefore there is no proof or knowledge in favor of the unjust. This is one of the most elegant and subtlest of Qur'anic arguments.[1]

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1 What makes it elegant and subtle is that the verse expresses two meanings by using the word *naṣīr* (helper) in this context: (1) there is no person or force to help the unjust against God's punishment; and (2) there is no proof or knowledge to help the unjust in argumentation and intellection. (Trans.)

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمُنْكَرَ ۖ يَكَادُونَ يَسْطُونَ بِالَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا ۗ قُلْ أَفَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِشَرٍّ مِنْ ذَٰلِكُمُ ۗ النَّارُ وَعَدَهَا اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٧٢﴾

(22:72) ***And when Our clear signs are recited to them you will find denial* (al-munkar)** ***on the faces of those who disbelieve; they almost spring upon* (yasṭūna)** ***those who recite to them Our signs. Say: Shall I inform you of what is worse than this? The fire; Allah has promised it to those who disbelieve; and how evil the resort!***

Munkar is an infinitive, meaning *inkār* (to deny, to disavow, to disown).“Finding denial on one’s face” means telling the signs of denial and reluctance in one’s face. *Yasṭūna* is derived from *saṭwah*.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says: *Saṭwah* means displaying a scary mood and a frightening state. It is used with prepositions *bāʾ* and *ʿalā* as: *saṭā*, *yasṭū*, *saṭwah*. One who has been shown a frightening mood is called: *masṭuwwun bihi*. *Saṭwah* is synonymous with *baṭshah* (to seize, to grab).

The meaning is: When Our verses are recited to them, you can see and recognize signs of denial in the faces of those who disbelieve, even though these verses are clear and evident signs. They are almost about to attack those who read and recite Our verses to them because of the rage that has overcome them.

… Say: Shall I inform you of what is worse than this?: This builds on their denial and how they avoid listening to the Qur’an. That is, say to them: You consider this Book to be bad, you keep away from it, and you avoid hearing it. But shall I inform you of what is worse? Perhaps I shall inform you of it so that you abstain from *that*—if you want to abstain from anything!

… The fire; Allah has promised it to those who disbelieve; and how evil the resort: This is an exposition of the “worse thing.” It means: Worse than this [the Qur’an] is the fire. It is worse because: *Allah has promised it to those who disbelieve; and how evil the resort!*

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوِ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ ۖ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ۚ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ ﴿٧٣﴾

(22:73) ***O people! A parable*** **(mathal)** ***is set forth, therefore listen to it: surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it; weak are the seeker and the sought.***

The verse addresses all people, with particular attention to the polytheists. A *mathal* (parable, example, likeness) is a description or story that resembles and illustrates something in some aspect. This could be either a real description, or an imaginary and fictional one like allegories with animal characters and talking objects. A parable is set forth in order to be pondered upon, just as a tent is raised in order to be inhabited.

The parable is: *Surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly, though they should all gather for it, and should the fly snatch away anything from them, they could not take it back from it*. It means: Let us assume that your gods decide to create a fly—which is the weakest of animals to you: they will never be able to do so! Furthermore, if a fly snatches away anything from them, they cannot take it back from it.

This parable illustrates the power of the gods that they served besides God in creating and directing the affairs. They are incapable of creating even a fly. They are unable to conduct the easiest of affairs, which is recovering what a fly has taken from them and the damage caused by it. So how can one be justified in calling upon and worshiping such gods?

… weak are the seeker **(al-ṭālib)** ***and the sought*** **(al-maṭlūb)*:*** Given the context of the verse, *al-ṭālib* (the seeker, the invoker) is the idols that they worship. This is because the parable involves a hypothetical case where their gods fail at two things: (1) the attempt to create a fly; and (2) the attempt to take back what a fly snatches away from them. *Al-maṭlūb* (the sought, the invoked) is the fly, in the sense that its creation and the recovery of what it has taken are sought.

This sentence shows the utter weakness of their gods, because they are weaker than what the people consider to be the weakest of animals out of those that have some share of power and intelligence.

مَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٧٤﴾

(22:74) ***They have not estimated Allah with the estimation that is due to Him*** **(qadrihi)*; most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty.***

The *qadr* of something is its "size and measure." It metaphorically

refers to the due position and status of something according to its attributes and qualities. "Estimating something with the estimation that is due to it" means giving it the position that it deserves and treating it as it is worthy of. Estimating God with due estimation is to abide by what His exalted attributes necessitate, and to treat Him as He deserves. It means to take Him alone as one's Lord, and to serve Him alone and no one else. However, the polytheists did not estimate God with the estimation that is due to Him, for they did not accept Him as their Lord and refused to worship him. Instead, they took up idols as lords besides Him and worshiped them besides Him. This is while they could see that these idols were incapable of creating even a fly, and that even a fly could render them helpless and humiliated. Thus, these idols are at the utmost degree of weakness and abasement, while God is the One Who is Strong, Mighty, and the ultimate source of creation and direction. He has created the universe and conducts all affairs.

Thus, the first part of the verse (*They have not estimated Allah with the estimation that is due to Him*) refers to their noncompliance with God's Lordship, their refusal to worship Him, and their substitution of idols for Him. They assumed the idols to be their lords instead of God, and they worshiped them in fear and hope instead of Him.

The second part of the verse (*most surely Allah is Strong, Mighty*) justifies the previous negation [*they have not estimated…*]. "Strong" and "Mighty" are mentioned in an unconditional form, implying that He is *absolutely* Strong and Mighty. That is: His power is never mixed with any weakness, and His *ʿizzah* (might, honor) is never defeated or disgraced. This matches what God says elsewhere: *The power is wholly Allah's* (2:165), and: *Surely all honor is for Allah* (4:139). These two names (Strong and Mighty) are specifically mentioned here because they are the opposites of two main attributes of their idols in the above parable [22:73]: weakness and humiliation. They disparaged and degraded God by making Him equal to their gods and idols, while He is the Strong God that can create anything that He wants, and the Mighty God that nothing can defeat or humiliate Him. Their gods, on the other hand,are unable to create even a fly, rather they are defeated and humiliated by one. The polytheists did not even stop at making God *equal* to their idols, but they went so far as giving priority and precedence to the idols over God. Thus, they chose them as their lords and worshiped them instead of God.

اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٧٥﴾

(22:75) ***Allah chooses*** **(yaṣṭafi, from iṣṭifā')** ***messengers from among the angels and from among the people; surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing.***

Iṣṭifā' is "to select the purest, choicest and best part of something." Al-Rāghib says:

> *Iṣṭifā'* is to get the *ṣafw* (pure part) of something, just as *ikhtiyār* is to get the *khayr* (good part) of it, and *ijtibā'* is to get the *jibāyah* (accumulated part) of something.[1]

Thus, God's *iṣṭifā'* of messengers from among the angels and men is his selection of those who are the fittest and choicest for being His emissaries.

This verse and the next one show the necessity of assigning messengers [by God] and how this is done. They also describe a necessary attribute of these messengers: infallibility. This verse is somewhat related to verse 22:67 (*to every nation We appointed an act of devotion which they observe*) since it talks about messengership.

The verse consists of two points: (1) God has messengers from among angels and from among men. (2) Their messengership is not haphazard; they are not selected randomly. Rather, only those who are suitable for this task are chosen and appointed.

… surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing: This justifies why God sends messengers. It is because human beings, just like any other species, have a natural and inherent need for God's guidance toward the felicity and perfection that mark the goal of their creation. Having and displaying this need for guidance is something universal in all species. One can say that displaying this need is effectively a call and request for its fulfillment, and God is Hearing and Seeing. He sees their innate need for guidance through His sight, and He hears their request for guidance through His hearing.

His hearing and sight require Him to send a messenger to them to guide them to the happiness that they have been created for, but is concealed from them. The thing is that not all people are fit to connect to the realm of transcendence, because people consist of both pure and impure, righteous and unrighteous. There are two classes of messengers:

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1 The verb form *iftiʿāl* is used when someone does an act with intention and deliberation. *Iṣṭifā'*, *ikhtiyār* and *ijtibā'* can all be translated as "to pick and choose, to cherry-pick." (Trans.)

(1) Angelic messengers who take God's revelation from Him and impart it to the human messengers.

(2) Human messengers who receive the revelation from angelic messengers and convey it to the people.

Overall, *surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing* proves the necessity for the dispatch of *some* messengers. However, the verse also implies that these messengers must be *chosen*. This is explained and justified in the next verse.

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٧٦﴾

(22:76) ***He knows what is before them and what is behind them and to Allah are all affairs returned.***

The pronoun "them" at face value refers to angelic and human messengers. The same idea has been mentioned about them in other verses, like where God quotes from the angels of revelation: *And we do not descend but by the command of your Lord; to Him belongs whatever is before us and whatever is behind us and whatever is between these, and your Lord is not forgetful* (19:64). He also says: *The Knower of the unseen! So He does not reveal His secrets to any,except to him whom He chooses as a messenger; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him,so that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them and He records the number of all things* (72:26-28).

As one can see, the verse talks about God's knowledge of "what is before and behind them" in order to show that He watches over the path of revelation between Him and the people. He preserves His revelation from any distortion, alteration or corruption that may be caused by a messengers' forgetfulness or by the devils' temptations and machinations. God's revelation is safe from all of these because its carriers (the messengers) are under the eyes of God. He witnesses them, knows what is before and behind them, and He is ever on the watch.

Based on the above, *what is before them* refers to what is between the messenger and the recipients of their message. *What is before* angelic messengers is what they convey to human messengers, and *what is before* human messengers is what they convey to the people. Likewise, *what is behind them* refers to what is between them and God. All of these [stages] compose a stream that flows from God toward the people.

This means that God's revelation is under divine protection from

the point where it originates from God until it reaches the people. An implication of this is that the messengers are infallible in their reception, preservation and transmission of God's revelation to people.

… and to Allah are all affairs returned: This justifies God's knowledge of: *what is before them and what is behind them*. In other words, how can any of these things be unknown to Him while He is the point of return and reference of all affairs? The "return of all affairs to God" is not something temporal so that one may imagine a period of ignorance for God before the return of affairs to Him. Instead, it means that all affairs belong to God by their being and essence. They are absolutely dependent on Him, and that is why nothing is hidden from Him. Reflect upon this.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ارْكَعُوا وَاسْجُدُوا وَاعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَافْعَلُوا الْخَيْرَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ۩ ﴿٧٧﴾

(22:77) ***O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord, and do good that you may succeed.***

Bow down and prostrate yourselves is equivalent to commanding, *Perform the prayer (*al-ṣalāh*).* The verse then adds: *and serve your Lord,* which refers to *other* acts of worship that have been legislated in Islam, such as pilgrimage and fasting. Thus, what remains for *and do good* is all other laws and rules in the shariah, since performing and attending to them involves the good of the society, the felicity of the individuals, and the [true] life of all. He says: *O you who believe! Answer (the call of) Allah and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life* (8:24). Hence, the verse enjoins everything that has been legislated in Islam, including rituals and other laws.

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ ۚ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ ۚ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۚ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَٰذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ ۚ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ ۖ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ ﴿٧٨﴾

(22:78) ***And strive hard in (the way of) Allah, (such) a striving*** **(jihād)** ***as is due to Him; He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; the faith of your father Abraham; He named you Muslims***

before and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people; therefore keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and hold fast by Allah; He is your Guardian; how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper!

Jihād means "exerting one's maximum effort (*juhd*) and ability in order to ward off the enemy." Its most common usage is warding off through fighting. However, sometimes the "enemy" is defined more broadly as anything that can pose danger, such as Satan who misleads humankind, or the evil-commanding soul [within every individual]. In this sense, jihad would apply to opposing one's base desires and disobeying Satanic temptations. The Prophet referred to opposing one's *nafs* (self, soul, ego) as *al-jihād al-akbar* (the greater or greatest struggle).

The apparent meaning of jihad in this verse is its most general and comprehensive sense, especially because it says *in (the way of) Allah,* which includes anything that pertains to God. This sense is confirmed by the verse: *and (as for) those who strive hard for Us, We will most certainly guide them in Our ways* (29:69).

Therefore, what is meant by striving for God (or in God) is to strive and struggle *only* for His sake and *sincerely* for Him, without associating anyone else in this struggle. This is similar to being wary of God as is due to Him: *Be careful of (your duty to) Allah with the care which is due to Him* (3:102).

… He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; the faith of your father Abraham: This is a favor by God to the believers, because were it not for His grace, the believers could not ever reach this religion and be blessed by it on their own and through their own power. It was God Who chose them, gathered them for this religion, and made them succeed. He removed all hardship in religion from them by His grace—including laws that are difficult in and of themselves,and laws that sometimes becomes difficult in certain cases and circumstances. He has blessed them with an easy and gentle shariah which is the faith of Abraham, the upright, who submitted to his Lord.

The verse refers to Abraham as "the father of Muslims" (lit. "submitters") because he was the first to submit to God[1], as God says: *When his*

1 Chronologically he is the first person whom the Qur'an describes as a submitter to God. See the author's exposition of verse 2:131, in volume 2, pp. 124ff of the English translation.

Lord said to him, "Submit," he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the nations (2:131). He also quotes from him, *Whoever follows me, he is surely of me* (14:36), whereby Abraham ascribed his followers to himself. Elsewhere he says: *And save me and my sons from worshiping idols* (14:35). Now, he would surely not pray for the polytheists, which means that what he meant by "my sons" were the Muslims [that is, those who believe in God and submit to him]. God also says: *Most surely the nearest of people to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe* (3:68).

… He named you Muslims before and in this: This is a second grace by God upon the believers, after the first one (*He has chosen you*).Therefore, the pronoun "He" refers' to God. "Before" means before the descent of the Qur'an, and "in this" means in this Book. The fact that He has blessed them by naming them"Muslims" shows that He has accepted their *islām*.[1]

… that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people: This is about witnessing the acts of people. We discussed this under verse 2:143[2] and other similar verses.[3]This sentence explains and justifies for what was mentioned before: *He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion…He named you Muslims.*

… therefore keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and hold fast by Allah; He is your Guardian* (mawlākum)*; how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper: The word "therefore" (the letter *fā'*) shows that what is said here is a conclusion that is drawn from all of the above mentioned blessings of God upon the believers. That is, *because* He has blessed you with these things, it is incumbent upon you to *keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and hold fast by Allah* in all affairs. "Prayer" and "poor-rate" represent devotional and financial rituals, respectively. "Holding fast to God" means that you should abide by all that He has commanded, and abstain from all that He has prohibited, without cutting off from Him under any circumstances. This is because *He is your Guardian* (mawlā), where *mawlā* can mean either "master" or "helper." A servant does not

1 *Islām* here can mean either submission or Islam. The two possible meanings would be: (1) He has accepted their act of submission; or (2) He has accepted their subscription to the religion of Islam. (Trans.)

2 See volume 2, pp. 153ff of the English translation. (Trans.)

3 For example, see verses 4:41, 9:9:94, 9:105, 16:84 and 16:89. (Trans.)

have the right to disconnect from his master under any circumstances; nor can a weak person sever his relationship with his helper. In other words, *He is your Guardian* is the reason and justification for the previous commands (*keep up prayer…*).

… how excellent the Guardian and how excellent the Helper: This is a praise of God. It also consoles the believers and strengthens their hearts, for their guardian and helper is God, besides Whom there is no other guardian or helper.

Note that our interpretation of the verse—including what is meant by being chosen, *islām*, and so on—is what the majority of the exegetes have suggested. It is based on the notion that the verse applies to all believers and the entire Muslim nation because it starts with: *O you who believe* (22:77).

However, we have clarified time and again [in this book] that the real meaning of God's selection of a servant (*ijtibāʾ*) is making that servant *mukhlaṣ* (lit. "chosen"), meaning that the servant is entirely and exclusively for God, and no one else has any share in him. This is the attribute of only a few people and not the entire Muslim population. Likewise are the meanings of submission (*islām*) and holding fast to God (*iʿtiṣām*). Certainly what is meant by these terms here is their real meanings.

Therefore, the verse involves a sense of generalization in using these terms for the entire Muslim nation. The entire nation is described as "being chosen," "being submitters" and "being witnesses" on the account that it includes *individuals* who are *really* characterized by these qualities. This is similar to many such descriptions of all Israelites in the Qur'an, such as: *[He] made you kings* (5:20); and: *We made them excel the nations* (45:16).

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning verse 22:67 (*therefore they should not dispute with you about the matter*), *Jawāmiʿ al-jāmiʿ* says: It has been said that Budayl b. Warqāʾ and other non-believers of Khuzāʿah [a tribe in Mecca] asked the Muslims, "Why do you eat what you have killed, but you do not eat what God has killed?" by which they meant carrion.

Author's comment: The context of the verse does not support this narration.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The people of the Quraysh used to apply

musk and ambergris on the idols that were positioned around the Kaʿbah. The idol Yaghūth was in front of the door, Yaʿūq was on the right, and Nasr on the left. When they entered [the Sacred Mosque], they used to prostrate to Yaghūth, then turn while in prostration toward Yaʿūq, and then do the same toward Nasr to the left. Then they would say as their *talbiyah*: "Here I come, O God, here I come! Here I come; there is no partner for You except a partner that is Yours: You own him and what he owns."
Then God sent a green fly with four wings to eat all of the musk and ambergris [on the idols]. Thus God revealed: *O people! A parable is set forth, therefore listen to it…* (22:73).[1]

(3) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about these verses: *O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord, and do good that you may succeed. And strive hard in (the way of) Allah, (such) a striving as is due to Him…* (22:77-78). He said: This verse [22:78] is about us [Ahl al-Bayt]. We are the chosen ones, and God has not laid any *ḥaraj* (hardship) upon us in religion. *Ḥaraj* (hardship) is more severe than *ḍīq* (constriction).[2] *The faith of your father Abraham*: this is specifically about us [Ahl al-Bayt]. *He named you Muslims*: God named us Muslims; "*before*": in the previous scriptures; "*and in this*": in the Qur'an. *That the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people*: the Messenger of God is a witness to us that he conveyed God's message to us. And we shall be witnesses to the people on the Day of Resurrection. We will acknowledge on the Day of Resurrection whoever acknowledges [us],[3] and we will deny anyone who denies [us].[4]

Author's comment: There are numerous Shia narrations by the Imams in this regard. Our exposition of the verse should clarify what is meant

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bayyāʿ al-Anmāṭ.

2 *Ḥaraj* and *ḍīq* are synonymous. The Imam's distinction shows that God has lifted *severe* hardship and obstacles from the religion, which does not contradict having *some* difficulty and pressure. (Trans.)

3 That is, "our truth and *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority)." (Trans.)

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Burayd al-ʿIjlī.

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